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THE WAY OF AMBITION

ROBERT HICHENS

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THE WAY OF AMBITION

"CHARMIAN, WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY CORNISH GENIUS? D'YOU LIKE HIM SO MUCH?"—*Page 76*

THE WAY OF AMBITION

BY

ROBERT HICHENS

Author of "The Garden of Allah," "The Spiritual Vine," "The Woman with the Fan," "The Voice of Conscience," "Felix," etc.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR
AND FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN BLACK-AND-WHITE BY

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August, 1913

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THE WAY OF AMBITION

CHAPTER I

"WE want a new note in English music," said Charmian, in her clear and slightly authoritative voice. "The Hallelujah Chorus era has gone at last to join all the Victorian relics. And the nation is drifting musically. Of course we have a few composers who are being silly in the attempt to be original, and a few others who still believe that all the people can stand in the way of home-grown products is a ballad or a Te Deum. But what we want is an English composer with a soul. I'm getting quite sick of heads. They are bearable in literature. But when it comes to music, one's whole being clamors for more."

"I have heard a new note in English music," observed a middle-aged, bald and lively-looking man, who was sitting on the opposite side of the drawing-room in Berkeley Square.

"Oh, but, Max, you always—"

"An absolutely new note," interrupted Max Elliot with enthusiastic emphasis, turning to the man with the sarcastic mouth who had just spoken. "Your French blood makes you so inclined to incredulity, Paul, that you are incapable of believing anything but that I am carried away."

"As usual!"

"As sometimes happens, I admit. But you will allow that in matters musical my opinion is worth something, my serious and deliberately formed opinion."

"How long has this opinion been forming?"

"Some months."

"Some months!" exclaimed Charmian. "You've kept your new note to yourself all that time! Is it a woman? But of course it can't be. I don't believe there will ever be a great woman composer."

"It is not a woman."

"Was it born in the gutter?" asked Paul Lane.

"No."

"Don't say it's aristocratic!" said Charmian, slightly screwing up her rather Japanese-looking eyes. "I cannot believe that anything really original in soul, really intense, could emanate from the British peerage. I know it too well."

"It is neither aristocratic nor from the gutter. It is of the middle classes. Its father is a banker in the West of England."

"A banker!" said Charmian in a deplorable voice.

"It is Cornish."

"Cornish! That's better. Strange things sometimes come out of Cornwall."

"It has a little money of its own."

"And its name—"

"Is Claude Heath."

"Claude Heath," slowly repeated Charmian. "The name means nothing to me. Do you know it, Mr. Lane?"

Paul Lane shook his smooth black head.

"Heath has not published anything," said Max Elliot, quite unmoved by the scepticism with which the atmosphere of Mrs. Mansfield's drawing-room was obviously charged.

"Not even a Te Deum?" asked Charmian.

"No, though I confess he has composed one."

"If he has composed a Te Deum I give him up. He is *vieux jeu*. He should go and live in the Crystal Palace."

"And it's superb!" added Max Elliot. "Till I heard it I never realized what the noble words of the Te Deum meant."

Suddenly he got up and moved toward the window murmuring, "All the Earth doth worship Thee, the Father Everlasting."

There was a silence in the room. Charmian's eyes suddenly filled with tears, she scarcely knew why. She felt as if a world was opening out before her, as if there were wide horizons to call to the gaze of those fitted to look upon them, and as if, perhaps, she were one of these elect.

"Father Everlasting!" The words, and the way in which Max Elliot had spoken them, struck into her heart, and so

made her feel keenly that she was a girl who had a heart that was not hard, that was eager, desirous, perhaps deep. As to Paul Lane, he stared at his remarkably perfect boots, and drew down the corners of his lips, and his white face seemed to darken as if a cloud floated through his mind and cast a shadow outward.

In the pause the drawing-room door opened, and a woman with blazing dark eyes and snow-white hair, wearing a white teagown and a necklace of very fine Egyptian scarabs, came in, with an intense, self-possessed and inquiring look. This was Mrs. Mansfield, "my only mother," as Charmian sometimes absurdly called her.

"You are talking, or you were talking, of something or somebody interesting," she said at once, looking round her at the three occupants of the room.

Max Elliott turned eagerly toward her. He rejoiced in Mrs. Mansfield, and often came to her to "warm his hands at her delightful blaze."

"Of somebody very interesting."

"Whom we don't know?"

"Whom very few people in London know."

"A composer, my only mother, who never publishes, and who is the son of a banker in the West of England."

Charmian seemed suddenly to have recovered her former mood, but she blinked away two tears as she spoke.

"Why shouldn't he be?" said Mrs. Mansfield, sitting down on a large sofa which stood at right angles to the wood fire.

"I know, but it doesn't seem right."

"Don't be ridiculously conventional, my only child."

Charmian laughed, showing lovely, and very small teeth. She was not unlike her mother in feature, but she was taller, more dreamy, less vivid, less straightforward in expression. At times there was a hint of the minx in her. She emerged from her dreams to be impertinent. A certain shrewdness mingled with her audacity. At such moments, as men sometimes said, "you never knew where to have her." She was more self-conscious and more worldly than her mother. Secret ambition worried at her mind, and made her restless in body. When she looked at a crowd she sometimes felt an almost

sick sensation as of one near to drowning. "Oh, to rise, to be detached from all these myriads!" she thought. "To be apart and recognized as apart! Only that can make life worth the living." She had been heard to say, "I would rather sink for ever in the sea than in the sea of humanity. I would rather die than be one of the unknown living." Charmian sometimes exaggerated. But she was genuinely tormented by the modern craze for notoriety. Only she called it fame.

Once she had said something to her mother of her intense desire to emerge from the crowd. Mrs. Mansfield's reply was: "Do you believe you have creative force in you then?" "How can I know?" Charmian had answered. "I'm so young." "Try to create something and probably you'll soon find out," returned her mother. Since that day Charmian had tried to create something, and had found out. But she had not told Mrs. Mansfield. She was now twenty-one, and had been just eighteen when her mother's advice had driven her into the energy which had proved futile.

Max Elliot crossed the room and sat down on the sofa by Mrs. Mansfield. He adored her quite openly, as many men did. The fact that she was a widow and would never marry again made adoration of her agreeably uncomplex. Everybody knew that Mrs. Mansfield would never marry again, but nobody perhaps could have given a perfectly clear explanation of how, or why, that knowledge had penetrated him. The truth was that she was a woman with a great heart, and had given that heart to the husband who was dead, and for whom she had never worn "weeds."

"What are we to do for Charmian, my dear Max?" continued Mrs. Mansfield, throwing a piteous look into her mobile face, a piteous sound into her voice. "What can anyone do for a young woman of twenty-one who, when she is thinking naturally, thinks it impossible for a West of England banker to cause the birth of a son talented in an art?"

"I always said there was intellectual cruelty in mother," said Charmian, drawing her armchair nearer to the fire.

"It's bracing, tones up the mind," said Paul Lane. "But what about this new note? All we know is a Cornish extraction, a banker papa and a Te Deum."

"Oh—a Te Deum!" observed Mrs. Mansfield, looking suddenly sceptical.

"I know! I know!" said Max Elliot. "I didn't want to hear it till I had heard it. And then I wanted to hear nothing else. The touch of genius startles everything into life."

"Another genius!" said Paul Lane.

And thereupon, as if acting on a sudden impulse, he got up, said good-bye, and went away with his curiosity, if he had any, ungratified.

"He's spoilt by the French blood his mother gave him," said Mrs. Mansfield as the door closed. "If he had been all French, one might have delighted in him, taken him on the intellectual side, known where one was, skipped the coldness and the irony, clung to the wit, vivacity and easy charm. But he's a modern Frenchman, boxing with an Englishman and using his feet half the time. And that's dreadful. In an English drawing-room I don't like the Savate. Now tell us, tell us! I am so thankful he is not a celebrity."

"Nor ever likely to be unless he marries the wrong woman."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Charmian with curiosity.

"A woman who is ambitious for him and pushes him."

"But if this Claude Heath has so much talent, surely it would be a fine thing to make him give it to the world."

"That depends on his temperament, I daresay," said Mrs. Mansfield. "I believe there are people who ought to hide their talents in a napkin."

"Oh, mother! Explain!"

"Some plants can only grow in darkness."

"Very nasty ones, I should think! Deadly nightshade! That sort of thing!"

"Poor dear! I gave her light in a vulgar age. She can't help it," said Mrs. Mansfield to Max Elliot. "We are her refined seniors. But sheer weight of years has little influence. Never mind. Go on. You and I at least can understand."

As she spoke she laid her hand, on which shone several curious rings, over Charmian's, and she kept it there while Max Elliot gave some account of Claude Heath.

"He's not particularly handsome in features. He's quite

conventional in dress. His instinct would probably be to use the shell as a close hiding-place for anything strange, unusual that it contains. He crops his hair, and, I should think, wets it two or three times a day for fear people should see that it has a natural wave in it. His neckties are the most humdrum that can be discovered in the shops."

"Does he dislike his appearance?" asked Charmian.

"I daresay. The worst of it is that he has eyes that give the whole thing away to a Mrs. Mansfield."

"What, and not to me?" said Charmian, in an injured note.

"She's fairly sharp, poor dear!" observed Mrs. Mansfield, in a rescuing voice. "You mustn't be too hard on her."

Max Elliot smiled.

"And a Charmian Mansfield."

"What color are his eyes?" inquired Charmian.

"I really can't tell you for certain, but I should think dark gray."

"And where does he live?"

"In a little house not far from St. Petersburg Place on the north side of the Park, Mullion House he calls it. He's got a studio there which opens into a pocket-handkerchief of a garden. He keeps two women servants."

"Any dogs?" said Charmian.

"No."

"Cats?"

"Not that I know of."

"I don't feel as if I should like him. Does he compose at the piano?"

"No, away from it."

"He's unsympathetic. Cropped hair watered down, humdrum neckties, composing away from the piano, no animals—it's all against me except the little house."

"Because you take the wholly conventional view of the musician," said her mother. "If I dared to say such a thing to my own child I might add, without telling a dangerous lie, because you are so old-fashioned in your views. You can't forget having read the *Vie de Bohème*, and having heard, and unfortunately seen, Paderewski when you were a schoolgirl at Brighton."

"It is my beloved mother's fault that I ever was a schoolgirl at Brighton."

"Ah, don't press down that burden of crime upon my soul! Lift it, by freeing yourself from the Brighton tradition, which I ought to have kept for ever from you. And now, Max, tell us, whom does Mr. Heath know?"

"I know very little about his acquaintance. I met him first at Wonderland."

"What's that?" asked Charmian. "It sounds more promising."

"It's gone now, but it was a place in Whitechapel, where they had boxing competitions, Conky Joe against the Nutcracker—that kind of thing."

"I give him up, Te Deum, Conky Joe and all!" she exclaimed in despair.

"Do you mean me to meet him, Max?" asked Mrs. Mansfield.

"Yes. I can't keep him to myself any longer. I must share him with someone who understands. Come to-morrow evening, won't you, after dinner? Heath is dining with me."

"Yes. Is Charmian invited?"

Max Elliot looked at Charmian, and she steadily returned his gaze.

"You know," he said after a pause, "that you've got a certain hankering after lions?"

"Hankering! Don't, don't!"

"But you really have!"

"I will not be put with the vulgar crowd like that. I do not care for lions. Tigers are my taste."

He laughed.

"Do come then. But remember, there are plants which can only grow in darkness. And I believe this is one of them."

When Max Elliot had gone, Charmian sat for two or three minutes looking into the fire, where pale, steely-blue lights played against the prevailing gold and red. All the absurdity, the nonsense, had dropped away from her.

"Max Elliot seems quite afraid of me," she said at last. "Am I so very vulgar?"

"Not more so than most intelligent young women who are rather 'in it' in London," returned her mother.

"Surely I'm not a climber, without knowing it!"

"No, I don't think so. But your peculiar terror of mixing with the crowd naturally makes you struggle a little, and puff and blow in the effort to keep your head above water."

"How very awful! I don't know why it is, but your head always is well above water without your making any effort."

"I don't bother as to whether it is or not, you see."

"No. But what has it all to do with this Mr. Heath?"

"Perhaps we shall find out to-morrow night. Max may think you'll be inclined to rave about him."

"Rave about a cropped head that composes away from the piano!"

"Ah, that Brighton tradition!" said Mrs. Mansfield, taking up Steiner's *Teosofia*.

CHAPTER II

IN the comedy of London Mrs. Mansfield and her daughter did not play leading parts, but they were, in the phrase of the day, "very much in it." Mrs. Mansfield's father had been a highly intelligent, cultivated, charming and well-off man, who had had a place in the Isle of Wight, and been an intimate friend of Tennyson, and of most of the big men of his day. Her mother had possessed the peculiar and rather fragile kind of beauty which seems to attract great English painters, and had been much admired and beloved in Melbury Road, Holland Park, and elsewhere. She, too, had been intelligent, intellectual and very musical. From Frederick Leighton's little parties, where Joachim or Norman Neruda played to a chosen few, the beautiful Mrs. Mortimer and her delightful husband were seldom missing. They were prominent members of that sort of family party which made the "Monday Pops" for years a social as well as an artistic function. And their small, but exquisite house in Berkeley Square, now inherited by their daughter, was famous for its "winter evenings," at which might be met the *crème de la crème* of the intellectual and artistic worlds, and at which no vulgarian, however rich and prominent, was ever to be seen.

Mrs. Mansfield, quite instinctively and naturally, had carried on the family tradition; at first with her husband, Arthur Mansfield, one of the most cultivated and graceful members of their "set," and after his death alone. She was well off, had a love of beauty and comfort, but a horror of display, and knew everyone she cared to know, without having the vaguest idea who was, or was not, included in "the smart set." Having been brought up among lions, she had never hunted a lion in her life, though she had occasionally pulled the ears of one, or stroked its nose. She had been, and was, the intimate friend of many men and women who were "doing things" in the world. But she had never felt within herself

the power to create anything original, and was far too intelligent, far too aristocratic in mind, to struggle impotently to be what she was not meant to be, or to fight against her own clearly seen limitations.

Unlike Mrs. Mansfield in this respect Charmian struggled, and her mother knew it.

On the following evening, when Charmian and her mother were dining together before going to Max Elliot's, she said rather abruptly:

"Why didn't Mr. Elliot invite us to dinner to-night, do you think?"

"Why should he have invited us?"

"Well, perhaps it wasn't necessary. But surely it would have been quite natural."

"Probably he wanted to prepare the new note for you."

"Why should I require preparation?"

"The new note!"

"Why should the new note require preparation against me?"

"I said for you. Possibly we may find out this evening. Besides Delia is in a rest cure as usual. So there is no hostess."

Delia was Max Elliot's wife, a graceful nonentity who, having never done a stroke of work in her life, was perpetually breaking down, and being obliged to rest expensively under the supervision of fashionable doctors. She was now in Hampstead, enclosed in a pale green chamber, living on milk and a preparation called "Marella," and enjoying injections of salt water. She was also being massaged perpetually by a stout young woman from Sweden, and was deprived of her letters. "No letters!" was a prescription which had made her physician celebrated.

"Oh, the peace of it!" Mrs. Elliot was faintly murmuring to the athletic masseuse, at the very moment when Charmian said:

"There very seldom is a hostess. Poor Max Elliot!"

"He's accustomed to it. And Delia must be doing something. This time she may be cured. Life originally issued from the sea, they say."

"Near Margate, I suppose. What a mystery existence is!"

"Are you going to be tiresome to-night?"

"No, I won't, I won't. But if he plays his Te Deum I know I shall sleep like a tired child."

"I don't suppose he will."

"I feel he's going to."

"Then why were you so anxious to go?"

"I don't like to be left out of things. No one does."

"Except the elect. How thoughtful of you to dress in black!"

"Well, dearest, you are always in white. And I love to throw up my beautiful mother."

Mrs. Mansfield put an arm gently round her as they left the dining-room.

"You could make any mother be a sister to you."

Just before ten their motor glided up to the Elliots' green door in Cadogan Place.

Max Elliot was the very successful senior partner of an old-established stockbroking firm in the City. This was a fact, so people had to accept it. But acceptance was made difficult by his almost strangely unfinancial appearance and manner. Out of the City he never spoke of the City. He was devoted to the arts, and especially to music, of which he had a really considerable knowledge. All prominent musicians knew him. He was the friend of *prime donne*, a pillar of the opera, an ardent frequenter of all the important concerts. Where Threadneedle Street came into his life nobody seemed to know. Nevertheless, his numerous clients trusted him completely as a business man. And more than one singer, whose artistic temperament had brought her—or him, as the case might be—to the door of the poorhouse, had reason to bless Max Elliot's shrewd business head and generous industry in friendship. He had a good heart as well as a fine taste, and his power of criticism had not succeeded in killing his capacity for enthusiasm.

"*He's* not begun yet!" murmured Charmian to her mother, as the butler led them sedately down a rather long hall, past two or three doors, to the music-room which Elliot had built out at the back of his house.

"I never heard that he was going to begin at all. We haven't come here for a performance, but to make an acquaintance."

Charmian twisted her lips, and the butler opened the door and announced them.

At the end of the room, which was panelled with wood and was high, by a large open fireplace, Max Elliot was sitting with Paul Lane and two other people, a woman and a young man. The woman was large and broad, with brown hair, reckless hazel eyes, and a nose and mouth which suggested a Roman emperor. She looked about thirty-five. In her large ears, which were set very flat against her head, there were long, diamond earrings, and diamonds glittered round her neck. She was laughing when the Mansfields came in, and went on laughing while Max Elliot went to receive them.

"Mrs. Shiffney has just come," he said. "Paul has been dining."

"And—the other?" murmured Charmian, with a hushed air of awed expectation which was not free from a hint of mockery.

Mrs. Mansfield sent her a glance of half-humorous rebuke.

"Claude Heath," answered Elliot.

"How wonderful he is."

"Charmian, don't be tiresome!" observed her mother, as they went toward the fire.

The two men got up, and Charmian had an impression of height, of a bony slimness that was almost cadaverous, of irregular features, rather high cheek-bones, brown, very short hair, and large, enthusiastic and observant eyes that glanced almost piercingly at her, and quickly looked away.

Mrs. Shiffney remained in her armchair, moved her shoulders, and said in a rather deep, but not disagreeable voice:

"Mr. Heath and I are hearing all about 'Marella.' It builds you up if you are a skeleton and pulls you down if you are enormous, as I am. It makes you sleep if you suffer from insomnia, and if you have the sleeping sickness it wakes you up. Dr. Curling has patented it, and feeds his patients on nothing else. Delia is living entirely on it, and is to emerge looking seventeen and a female Sandow. Mr. Heath is longing to try it."

She had held out a powerful hand to the new arrivals, and

now turned toward the composer, who stood waiting to be introduced.

"Oh, but no, please!" said Heath, speaking quickly and almost anxiously, with a certain naïveté that was attractive, but that did not suggest simplicity, but rather great sensitiveness of mind. "I never take quack medicines or foods. I have no need to. And I think they're all invented to humbug us."

Max Elliot took him by the arm.

"I want to introduce you to a dear friend of mine, Mrs. Mansfield."

He paused and added:

"Mr. Claude Heath—Miss Mansfield."

Paul Lane began talking to Charmian when the two handshakes—Heath had shaken hands quickly—were over. She looked across the room, and saw her mother in conversation with the composer. And she knew immediately that he had conceived a strong liking for her mother. It seemed to her in that moment as if his liking for her mother might prevent him from liking her, and, she did not know why, she was aware of a faint sensation of hostility toward him. Yet usually the fact that a man admired, or was fond of, Mrs. Mansfield predisposed Charmian in his favor.

Perhaps to-night she was in a tiresome mood, as her mother had hinted.

As she talked to Paul Lane, whom she had known pretty well for years, and liked as much as she could ever like him, she was secretly intent on the new note. Her quick mind of an intelligent girl, who had seen many people and been much in contact with the London world, was pacing about him, measuring, weighing, summing up with the audacity of youth. Whether he pleased her eyes she was not sure. But through her eyes he interested her.

Heath was tall, and looked taller than he was because he was almost emaciated, and he was a plain man whom something made beautiful, not handsome. This was a strange, and almost mysterious imaginativeness which was expressed by his face, and even, perhaps, by something in his whole bearing and manner. It looked out certainly at many moments from

his eyes. But not only his eyes shadowed it forth. The brow, the rather thin lips, the hands, and occasionally their movements, suggested it. His face was not what is often called "an open face." Although quite free from slyness, or anything unpleasantly furtive, it had a shut, reserved look when his eyes were cast down. There was something austere, combined with something eager and passionate, in his expression and manner. Charmian guessed him to be twenty-six or twenty-seven.

He was now turned sideways to Charmian, and was moving rather restlessly on the sofa beside Mrs. Mansfield, but was listening with obvious intentness to what she was saying. Charmian found herself wondering how she knew that he had taken a swift liking to her mother.

"Did you have an interesting time at dinner?" she asked Paul Lane.

"Not specially so. Music was never mentioned."

"Was boxing?"

"Boxing!"

"Well, Mr. Elliot said he and Mr. Heath met first at a place in Whitechapel where Conky somebody was fighting the Nutcracker."

Lane smiled with his mouth.

"I suspect the new note to be a poseur, not quite of the usual species, but a poseur. Most musicians are ludicrously of their profession. This one is too much apparently detached from it to be quite natural. But the truth is, nobody is really natural. And no doubt it's a great mercy that it is so."

Charmian looked at him for a few seconds in silence. Then she observed:

"You know there's something in you that I can't abide, as old dames say."

This time Lane really smiled.

"I hope so," he said. "Or else I should certainly lack variety. Well, Max, what is it?"

"Mrs. Shiffney wants you."

"I always want him. I swim in his irony and can't sink, like a tourist in the Dead Sea."

"What a left-handed compliment!"

"A right-handed one would bore you to death, and my aim in life is—"

"To avoid being bored. How often do you succeed in your aim?"

"Whenever I am with you in this delightful house."

"It is delightful," said Charmian to her host. "But why? Of course it is beautiful. But that's not all. It's personal. Perhaps that's it."

She got up, and walked slowly away from the fire, very naturally, with a gesture, just touching her soft cheek and fluttering her fingers toward the glow, as if she were too hot. Max Elliot accompanied her.

"And all the lovely music that has sounded here," she continued, "perhaps lingers silently in the air, and, without being aware of it, we feel the vibrations."

She sat down on a sofa near the Steinway grand piano, which stood on a low dais, looked up at Max Elliot, and added, in quite a different voice:

"Shall we hear any of his music to-night?"

"I believe now we may."

"Why—now?"

Elliot looked toward Mrs. Mansfield.

"Because of mother, you mean?"

"He likes her."

"Anyone can see that."

After a moment she added, with a touch of irritation:

"He's evidently very difficile for an unknown man."

"No, it isn't that at all. If you ever know him well, you will understand."

"What?" she asked with petulance.

"That his reserve is a right instinct, nothing more. Between ourselves," he bent toward her, "I made a little mistake in asking Mrs. Shiffney, delightful though she is."

"I wondered why you had asked her, when you didn't want even to ask me."

"Middle-aged as I am, I get carried away by people. I met Mrs. Shiffney to-day at a concert. She was so absolutely right in her enthusiasm, so clever and artistic—though she's

ignorant of music—over the whole thing, that—well, here she is."

"And here I am!"

"Yes, here you are!" he said genially.

He had been standing. Now he sat down beside her, crossed one leg over the other, held his knee with his clasped hands, and continued:

"The worst of it is Mrs. Shiffney has made him bolt several doors. When she looked at him I could see at once that she made him feel transparent."

"Poor thing! Tell me, do you enjoy very much protecting all the sensitive artistic temperaments that come into this room? Do you enjoy arranging the cotton-wool wadding so that there may be no chance of a nasty jar, to say nothing of a breakage?"

He pursed his rather thick lips, that smiled so easily.

"When the treasure is a treasure, genuinely valuable, I don't mind it. I feel then that I am doing worthy service."

"You really are a dear, you know!" she said, with a sudden change, a melting. "It was good of you to ask me, when you didn't want to."

She leaned a little toward him, with one light hand palm downward on the cushion of the sofa, and her small, rather square chin thrust forward in a way that made her look suddenly intense.

"I'll try not to be like Mrs. Shiffney. I'll try not to make him feel transparent."

"I'm not sure that you could," he said, smiling at her.

"How horrid of you to doubt my powers! Why, why will nobody believe I have anything in me?"

She brought the words out with a force that was almost vicious. As she said them it happened that Claude Heath turned a little. His eyes travelled down the room and met hers. Perhaps her mother had just been speaking to him of her, had been making some assertion about her. For he seemed to look at her with inquiry.

When Charmian turned away her eyes from his she added to Max Elliot:

"But what does it matter? Because people, some people,

can't see a thing, that doesn't prove that it has no existence. And I don't really care what people think of me."

"This—to your old friend!"

"Yes. And besides, I expect one must possess to discover."

Her voice was almost complacent.

"You deal in enigmas to-night."

"One ought to carry a light when one goes into a cave to seek for gold."

But Elliot would not let her see that he had from the first fully understood her impertinence.

"Let us go back to the fire," he said. "Unless you are really afraid of the heat. Let us hear what your mother and Heath are talking about."

"I'm not afraid of anything except a Te Deum."

"There's Mrs. Shiffney speaking to him. I don't think we shall have it to-night."

"Then I'll venture to draw near," said Charmian, again assuming a semblance of awe.

The minx was evidently uppermost in her as they approached the others. She walked with a dainty slowness, a composed consciousness, that were almost the least bit affected, and as she stood still for a minute close to her mother, with her long eyes half shut, she looked typically of the world worldly, languid, almost prettily disdainful.

Mrs. Shiffney was speaking of the concert of that afternoon with discrimination and with enthusiasm.

"Of course he's a little monkey," she concluded, evidently alluding to some artist. "But *what* a little monkey! I was in the front row, and he called my attention to everything he was going to do, sometimes in Russian, sometimes in dreadful French, or in English that was really a criminal offense, and very often with his right elbow. He has a way of nudging the air in one's direction so that one feels it in one's side. Animal magnetism, I suppose. And he begs for sympathy as if it were a biscuit. Do you know him, Mr. Heath?"

"No, not at all. I know very few big artists."

"But all the young coming ones, I suppose? Did you study abroad?"

"I went to the Royal College at Kensington Gore."

Mrs. Shiffney, who was very cosmopolitan, had a flat in Paris, and was more often out of England than in it, slightly raised her eyebrows.

"You haven't studied in France or Germany?"

Heath began to look rather uncomfortable, and slightly self-conscious.

"No," he said quickly.

He paused, then as if with a decided effort he added:

"I think the training a student gets at the Royal College is splendid."

"Of course it is," said Max Elliot, heartily.

Mrs. Shiffney shook her shoulders.

"I'm sure it's quite perfect," she said, in her rather deep voice, gazing at the young composer with eyes in which a light satire twinkled. "Don't think I'm criticizing it. Only I'm so dreadfully un-English, and I think English musicians get rather into a groove. The Hallelujah bow-wow, you know!"

At this point in the conversation Charmian tranquilly interposed.

"Mr. Heath," she said, slightly protruding her chin, "when you've done with my only mother"—Mrs. Shiffney's lips tightened ever so little—"I want you to be very nice to me."

"Please tell me," said Heath, with the almost anxious eagerness that seemed to be characteristic of him.

Mrs. Mansfield fixed her blazing eyes on her daughter, slightly drawing down her gray eyebrows.

"Well, it's rather a secret."

Charmian glanced round at the others, then she added:

"It's about the Nutcracker."

"The Nutcracker!"

Heath puckered up his forehead.

"Yes." She moved a little, and looked at the chair not far from the fire on which she had sat when first she came into the room. "I care rather for boxing. Now"—she went slowly toward the chair, followed by Heath, "what I want to know, and what you can tell me, is this"—she sat down, and leaned her chin on her upturned palm—"on *present* form do you believe the Nutcracker is up to Conky Ja-ky Joe?"

As Claude Heath sat down to reply to this question, Mrs. Shiffney said:

"Conky Jarky Joe! I thought I was *dans le mouvement* up to my dog-collar, but I know nothing about the phenomenon. Where does it belong to?"

"Wonderland," said Elliot, in a gravely romantic voice.

"That's the land I've never seen, although I've had the yacht for so many years."

"Nor I!" said Paul Lane. "I don't believe it exists, or we must have been there. We have both been everywhere."

"Tell the poor things about it," said Mrs. Mansfield. "Then Adelaide can get up steam on *The Wanderer* and realize her dreams."

"But Mr. Elliot told me he met you there, and I remember distinctly his saying the fight was on between those two pets of the ring," said Charmian plaintively, after a certain amount of negation from Claude Heath.

"Yes, but I'm sure he didn't tell you I was an authority on boxing form."

"You aren't?"

"No, indeed!"

"But you want to be?"

"I shouldn't mind. But it isn't my chief aim in life."

Charmian was silent. She leaned back, taking her chin from her hand, and at last said gravely:

"It isn't *that*, then?"

"That—what?" exclaimed Heath, looking at her and away from her.

"That you want. It's something else. Because you know you want a very, very great deal of something."

"Oh, a good many of us do, I suppose."

"I don't think I do. I'm quite satisfied with my life. I have a good mother, a comfortable home. What should a properly-brought-up English girl, who has been educated at Brighton, want more?"

"I'm very glad indeed to know that a Brighton education stands its receiver in such good stead in the after years, very glad indeed!"

"You are laughing at me. And that's unchristian."

"Oh, but—but you were laughing at me!"

Despite Heath's eagerness, and marked social readiness of manner, Charmian was disagreeably conscious of a mental remoteness in him. Only the tip of his mind, perhaps scarcely that, was in touch with hers. Now she almost regretted that she had chosen to begin their acquaintance with absurdity, that she had approached Heath with a pose. She scarcely knew why she had done so. But she half thought, only half because of her self-respect, that she had been a little afraid of him, and so had instinctively caught up some armor, put a shield in front of her. Was she really impressed by a well-spoken-of Te Deum? She glanced at Heath inscrutably, as only woman can, and knew that she was not. It was the man himself who had caused her to fall into what she already thought of as a mistake. There was in Heath something that almost confused her. And she was not accustomed to be confused.

"I've made a bad beginning," she almost blurted out, not able to escape from artifice, yet speaking truth. "And I'm generally rather good at beginnings. It's so easy to take the first step, I think, despite that silly saying which, of course, I'm not going to quote. It's when one is getting to know a person really well that difficulties generally begin."

"Do they?"

"Yes, because it's then that very reserved people begin hurriedly building barricades, isn't it? I ask you, because I'm not at all reserved."

"But how should I know any better than you?"

"You mean, when you're so unreserved, too? No, that's true."

Heath's eyes troubled Charmian. She was feeling with every moment less at ease in his companionship and more determined to seem at ease. Being generally self-possessed, she had a horror of slipping into shyness and so retrograding from her usual vantage ground. She expected him to speak. It was his turn. But he said nothing. She felt sure that he had seen through her last lie, and that he was secretly resenting it as a heavy-footed approach to sacred ground. What a blunderer she was to-night! Desperation seized her.

"We must leave the question to the reserved," she said. "Poor things! I always pity them. They can never taste life as you and I and our kind are able to. We are put here to try to know and to be known. I feel sure of that. So the reserved are for ever endeavoring to escape their destiny. No wonder they are punished!"

"I am not sure that I entirely agree with your view as to the reason why we are put here," observed Heath, without a trace of obvious sarcasm. Nevertheless, the mere words stung Charmian's almost childish self-conceit.

"But I wasn't claiming to have pierced the Creator's most secret designs!" she exclaimed. "I was simply endeavoring to state that it can scarcely be natural for men and women to try to hide all they are from each other. I think there's something ugly in hiding things; and ugliness can't be meant."

"Ugliness is certainly not meant," said Heath, and for the first time she felt as if she were somewhere not very far from him. "Except very often by man. Isn't it astonishing that men created Venice and that men have now put steam launches in the canals of Venice!"

Venice! Charmian seized upon the word, mentally leaped upon and clung to the city in the sea. From that moment their conversation became easier, and gradually Charmian began to recover from her strange social prostration. So she thought of it. She forced the note, no doubt. Afterward she was unpleasantly conscious of that. But at any rate the talk flowed. There was some give and take. The joints of their intercourse did not creak as if despairingly appealing to be oiled. Of course it was very banal to talk about Italy. But, still, these moments must come sometimes to all those who go much into the world. And what is Italy, beautiful, siren-like Italy, for if not to be talked about? Charmian said that to herself afterward, and was amazed at her own vulgarity of mind. Ah, yes! That was what she had disliked in Claude Heath—his faculty of making her feel almost vulgar-minded, vulgar-intellected! She coined horrible bastard words in her efforts to condemn him. But all that was later on, when she had even said good-night to her only mother.

Their tête-à-tête was broken by Mrs. Shiffney's departure to a reception at the Ritz. She must surely have been disappointed in the musician; but, if so, she was too clever to show it. And she was by way of being a good-natured woman and seldom seemed to think ill of anybody. "I have so many sins on my own conscience," she sometimes said, "that I decline to see other people's. I want them to be blind to mine. Sin and let sin is an excellent rule in social life." She seldom condemned anyone except a bore.

"If you ever pay a call, which I doubt," she said to Claude Heath as she was going, "I'm in Grosvenor Square. The Red Book will tell you."

She looked at him with her almost insolently self-possessed and careless eyes, and added:

"Perhaps some day you'll come on the yacht and show me the course to set for Wonderland. Mr. Elliot says you know it. And of course we all want to. I've been everywhere except there."

"I doubt if a yacht could take us there," said Heath, smiling as if to cover something grave or sad.

A piercing look again came into Mrs. Shiffney's eyes.

"I really hope I shall see you in Grosvenor Square," she said.

Without giving him time to say anything more she went away, accompanied from the room by Max Elliot, walking carelessly and looking very powerful and almost outrageously self-possessed.

Within the music-room there was a moment's silence. Then Paul Lane said:

"Delightful creature!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Mansfield. "Adelaide is delightful. And why? She always thinks of herself, lives for herself. She wouldn't put herself out for anyone. I've known her for years and would never go to her in a difficulty or trust her with a confidence. And yet I delight in her. I think it's because she's so entirely herself."

"She's a darling!" said Lane. "She's so preposterously human, in her way, and yet she's always distinguished. And she's so clever as well as so ignorant. I love that com-

bination. Even on a yacht she never seems to have a bad day."

Charmian looked at Claude Heath, who was silent. She was wondering whether he meant to call in Grosvenor Square, whether he would ever set sail with Mrs. Shiffney on *The Wanderer*.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Max Elliot came back they gathered round the fire, no longer split up into duets, and the conversation was general. Heath joined in frequently, and with the apparent eagerness which was evidently characteristic of him. He had facility in speaking, great quickness of utterance, and energy of voice. When he listened he suggested to Charmian a mind so alive as to be what she called "on the pounce." He had an odd air of being swayed, carried away, by what those around him were saying, even by what they were thinking, as if something in his nature demanded to acquiesce. Yet she fancied that he was secretly following his own line of thought with a persistence that was almost cold.

Lane led the talk at first, and displayed less of his irony than usual. He was probably not a happy man, though he never spoke of being unhappy. His habitual expression was of discontent, and he was too critical of life, endeavor, character, to be easily satisfied. But to-night he seemed in a softer mood than usual. Perhaps he had an object in seeming so. He was a man very curious in the arts. Elliot, who knew him well, was conscious that something in Heath's personality had made a strong impression upon him, and thought he was trying to create a favorable atmosphere in the hope that music might come of it. If this was so, he labored in vain. And soon doubtless he knew it. For he, too, pleaded another engagement, and, like Mrs. Shiffney, got up to go.

Directly the door shut behind him Charmian was conscious of relief and excitement. She even, almost despite herself, began to hope for a Te Deum; and, hoping, she found means to be wise. She effaced herself, so she believed, by withdrawing a little into a corner near the fire, holding up her Conder fan open to shield her face from the glow, and taking no part in the conversation, while listening to it with a pretty appearance of dreaminess. She was conscious of her charming

attitude, of the line made by her slender upraised arm, and not unaware of the soft and almost transparent beauty the light of a glowing fire gives to delicate flesh. Nevertheless, she really tried, in a perhaps half-hearted way, to withdraw her personality into the mist. And this she did because she knew well that her mother, not she, was en rapport with Claude Heath.

"I'm out of it," she said to herself, "and mother's in it."

Mrs. Shiffney had been a restraint, Lane had been a restraint. It would be dreadful if she were the third restraining element. She would have liked to be triumphantly active in bringing things about. Since that was evidently quite out of the question she was resolved to go to the other extreme.

"My only chance is to be a mouse!" she thought.

At least she would be a graceful mouse.

She gazed at the delicate figures on her Conder fan. They, those three a little way from her, were talking now, really talking.

Mrs. Mansfield was speaking of the endeavor of certain Londoners to raise the theater out of the rut into which it had fallen, and to make of it something worthy to claim the attention of those who did not use it merely for digestive purposes. She related a story of a disastrous theater-party which she had once joined, and which had been arranged by an aspiring woman with little sense of fitness.

"We dined with her first. She had, somehow, persuaded Burling, the Oxford historian, Mrs. Hartford, the dear poetess who never smiles, and her husband, and Cummerbridge, the statistician, to be of the party. After dinner where do you think she took us?"

"To the Oxford?" said Elliot, flinging his hands round his knee and beginning to smile.

"To front row stalls at the Criterion, where they were giving a knockabout farce called *My Little Darling* in which a clergyman was put into a boiler, a guardsman hidden in a linen cupboard, and a penny novelette duchess was forced to retreat into a shower-bath in full activity. I confess that I laughed more than I had ever done in my life. I sat between Burling, who looked like a terrified hen, and Mr. Hartford,

who was seriously attentive from beginning to end, and kept murmuring, 'Really! Really!' And I had the poetess's sibylline profile in full view. I was almost hysterical when it was over. As we were coming out Mr. Hartford said to his wife, 'Henrietta, I'm glad we came.' She rolled an eye on him and answered, with tears in the voice, 'Why?' 'It's a valuable lesson. We now know what the British public needs.' Her reply was worthy of her."

"What was it?" said Elliot, eagerly.

"'There are many human needs, Gabriel, which it is criminal to gratify.' Burling went home in a four-wheeler. Cummerbridge had left after the first act—a severe attack of neuralgia in the right eye."

Elliot's full-throated laugh rang through the room. Heath was smiling, but almost sadly, Charmian thought.

"Perhaps it was *My Little Darling* which brought about the attempt at better things you were speaking of," he said to Mrs. Mansfield.

"Ah, but their prophet is not mine!" she answered.

An almost feverish look of vitality had come into her face, which was faintly pencilled by the fingers of sorrow.

"Sometimes I think I hate the disintegrating drama more than I despise the vulgar idiocies which, after all, never really touch human life," she continued. "No doubt it is sheer weakness on my part to be affected by it. But I am. Only last week Charmian and I saw the play that they—the superior ones—are all flocking to. The Premier has seen it five times already. I loathed its cleverness. I loathed the element of surprise in it. I laughed, and loathed my own laughter. The man who wrote it would put cap and bells on St. Francis of Assisi and make a mock of Œdipus."

She paused, then, leaning forward, in a low and thrilling voice she quoted, "'For we are in Thy hand; and man's noblest task is to help others by his best means and powers.'"

Claude Heath gazed at her while she was speaking, and in his eyes Charmian, glancing over her fan, saw what she thought of as two torches gleaming.

"I came out of the theater," continued Mrs. Mansfield, "and I confess it with shame, feeling as if I should never find

again the incentive to a noble action, as if the world were turned to chaff. And yet I had laughed—how I had laughed!"

Suddenly she began to laugh at the mere recollection of something in the play.

"The wretch is terribly clever!" she exclaimed. "But he seems to me destructive."

"Well, but—" began Elliot. "Some such accusation has been brought against many really great men. The Empress Frederick told a friend of mine that no one who had not lived in Germany, and observed German life closely, could understand the evil spread through the country by Wagner's *Tristan*."

"Then the fault, the sin if you like, was in the hearers," said Heath, almost with excitement.

He got up and stood by the fire.

"Wagner was a builder. I believe Germany is the better for a *Tristan*, and I believe we should be the better for an English *Tristan*. But I doubt if we gain essentially by the drama in cap and bells."

Elliot, who was fond of defending his friends, came vigorously to the defense of the playwright, to whom he was devoted and whose first nights he seldom missed. In the discussion which followed Charmian saw more clearly how peculiarly in tune her mother's mind was with Heath's.

"This is the beginning of a great intimacy," she said to herself. "One of mother's great intimacies."

And, for the first time she consciously envied her mother, consciously wished that she had her mother's brains, temperament, and unintentional fascination. The talk went on, and presently she drifted into it, took her small part in it. But she felt herself too brainless, too ignorant to be able to contribute to it anything of value. Her usually happy and innocent self-conceit has deserted her, with all her audacities. She was oddly subdued, was almost sad.

"How old is he really?" she thought more than once as she looked at Claude Heath.

There was no mention of music, and at last Mrs. Mansfield got up to go.

As they said good-night she looked at Heath and remarked:

"We shall meet again?"

He clasped her hand, and answered, slightly reddening:

"Oh, I hope so! I do hope so!"

That was all. There was no mention of the Red Book, of being at home on Thursdays, no "If you're ever near Berkeley Square," etc. All that was unnecessary. Charmian touched a long-fingered hand and uttered a cold little "Good-night." A minute more and her mother and she were in the motor gliding through damp streets in the murky darkness.

After a short silence Mrs. Mansfield said:

"Well, Charmian, you escaped! Are you very thankful?"

"Escaped!" said a rather plaintive voice from the left-hand corner of the car.

"The dreaded Te Deum."

"Is he a musician at all? I believe Max Elliot has been humbugging us."

"He warned you not to expect too much in the way of hair."

"It isn't that. How old do you think he is?"

"Certainly not thirty."

"What did you tell him about me?"

"About you? I don't remember telling him anything."

"Oh, but you did, mother!"

"What makes you think so?"

"I know you did, when I was sitting near the piano with Max Elliot."

"Perhaps I did then. But I can't remember what it was. It must have been something very trifling."

"Oh, of course I know that!" said Charmian almost petulantly.

Mrs. Mansfield realized that the girl had not enjoyed her evening, but she was too wise to ask her why. Indeed she was not much given to the putting of intimate questions to Charmian. So she changed the subject quietly, and they were soon at home.

Twelve o'clock was striking as they entered the house. The evening, Mrs. Mansfield thought, had passed quickly. She was a bad sleeper, and seldom went to bed before one, but she never kept a maid sitting up for her.

"I'm going to read a book," she said to Charmian, with her hand on the door of the small library on the first floor, where she usually sat when she was alone.

Charmian, taller than she was, bent a little and kissed her.

"Wonderful mother!"

"What nonsense you talk; but only to me, I know!"

"Other people know it without my telling them. You jump into minds and hearts, and poor little I remain outside, squatting like a hungry child."

"And that is greater nonsense still. Come and sit up with me for a little."

"No, not to-night, you darling!"

Almost with violence Charmian kissed her again, released her, and went away up the stairs between white walls to bed.

CHAPTER IV

CHARMIAN had been right when she had said to herself, "This is the beginning of one of mother's great intimacies."

Claude Heath called almost at once in Berkeley Square; and in a short time he established a claim to be one of Mrs. Mansfield's close friends. She had several, but Heath stood out from among them. There was a special bond between the white-haired woman of forty-five and the young man of twenty-eight. Perhaps their freemasonry arose from the fact that each held tenaciously a secret: Mrs. Mansfield her persistent devotion to the memory of her dead husband, Heath his devotion to his art. Perhaps the two secrecies in some mysterious way recognized each other, perhaps the two reserves clung together.

These two in silence certainly understood each one something in the other that was hidden from the gaze of the world.

A fact in connection with their intimacy, which set it apart from the other friendships of Mrs. Mansfield, was this—Charmian was not included in it.

This exclusion was not owing to any desire of the mother. She was incapable of shutting any door, beyond which she did not stand alone, against her child. The generosity of her nature was large, warm, chivalrous, the link between her and Charmian very strong. The girl was wont to accept her mother's friends with a pretty eagerness. They spoiled her, because of her charm, and because she was the child of the house in which they spent some of their happiest hours. Never yet had there lain on Charmian's life a shadow coming from her mother. But now she entered a faintly shadowed way, as it seemed deliberately and of her own will. She tacitly refused to accept the friendship between her mother and Claude Heath as she had accepted the other friendships.

Gently, subtly, almost mysteriously, she excluded herself from it.

Or was she gently, subtly, almost mysteriously excluded from it by Claude Heath?

She chose to think so. And there were moments in which he chose to think that she obstinately declined to accept him as her mother accepted him, because she disliked him, was perhaps jealous of his intimacy with Mrs. Mansfield.

All this was below the surface. Charmian seemed friendly with Heath, and he, generally, at ease with her. But when he was alone with Mrs. Mansfield he was a different man. At first she thought little of this. She attributed it to the fact that Heath had a reserved nature and that she happened to hold a key which could unlock it, or unlock a room or two of it, leaving, perhaps, many rooms closed. But, being not only a very intelligent but a delicately sensitive woman, she presently began to think that there was some secret antagonism between her child and Heath.

This pained her. She even considered whether she ought not to put an end to her intimacy with Heath. She had grown to value it. She was incapable of entering into a sentimental relation with any man. She had loved deeply, had had her beautiful summer. It had died. The autumn was upon her. She regretted. Often her heart was by a grave, often it was beyond, seeking, like a bird with spread wings above dark seas seeking the golden clime it needs and instinctively knows of. But she did not repine. And she was able to fill her life, to be strongly interested in people and in events. She mellowed with her great sorrow instead of becoming blunted by it or withering under it. And so she drew people to her, and was drawn, in her turn, to them.

Claude Heath had brought into her life something her other friends had not given her. She realized this clearly when she first considered Charmian in connection with herself and him. If he ceased from her life, sank away into the crowd of unseen men, he would leave a gap which another could not fill. She had a feeling that she was valuable to him. She did not know exactly how or why. And he was valuable to her.

But of course Charmian was the first interest in her life,

had the first claim upon her consideration. She sat wondering what it was in Heath which the girl disliked, what it was in Charmian which, perhaps, troubled or irritated Heath.

Charmian was out that day at an afternoon concert, and Mrs. Mansfield had made an engagement to go to tea with Heath in his little old house near St. Petersburg Place. She had never yet visited him, although she had known him for nearly three months. And she had never heard a note of his music. The latter fact did not strike her as strange. She had never mentioned her dead husband to him.

Max Elliot had at first been perturbed by this reticence of the musician. He had specially wished Mrs. Mansfield to hear what he had heard. After that evening in Cadogan Square he had several times asked: "Well, have you heard the Te Deum?" or "Has Heath played any of his compositions to you yet?" To Mrs. Mansfield's invariable unembarrassed "No!" he gave a shrug of the shoulders, a "He's an extraordinary fellow!" or a "Well, I've made a failure of it this time!" Once he added: "Don't you want to hear his music?" "Not unless he wants me to hear it," Mrs. Mansfield replied. Elliot looked at her for a minute with his large, prominent and kind eyes, and said: "No wonder you're adored by your friends!" Several times since the evening in Cadogan Square he had heard Heath play his compositions, and he now began to feel as if he owed this pleasure to his busy and almost vulgar curiosity about musical development and the progress of artists, as if Heath's reserve were his greatest proof of regard and friendship. He had not succeeded in persuading Heath to come to one of his Sunday musical evenings, at which crowds of people in society and many artists assembled. Mrs. Mansfield taught him not to attempt any more persuasion. He realized that his first instinct had been right. The plant must grow in darkness. But he was always being carried away by artistic enthusiasms, and had an altruistic desire to share good things. And he dearly loved "a musical find." He had a certain name as a discoverer of talent, and there's so much in a name. The lives that have been changed, moulded, governed by a hastily conferred name!

Mrs. Mansfield was inclined to believe that Heath had in-

vited her to tea with the intention of at last submitting his talent to her opinion. They had sometimes talked together of music, but much oftener of books, character, people, national movements, topics of the day. As she went to her bedroom to dress for her expedition, she felt a certain hesitation, almost a disinclination to go. To go was to draw a step or two nearer to Heath, and so, perhaps, to retreat a step or two from her child. To-day the fact that Charmian and Heath did not quite "hit it off together" vexed her spirit, and the slight mystery of their relation troubled her. As she went down to get into the motor she was half inclined to speak to Heath on the subject. She was quite certain that she would not speak to Charmian.

The month was February, and by the time Mrs. Mansfield reached Mullion House evening was falling. A large motor was drawn up in front of the house, and as Mrs. Mansfield's chauffeur sounded a melodious chord the figure of a smartly dressed woman walked across the pavement and stepped into it. After an instant of delay, caused by this woman's footman, who spoke to her at the window, the car moved off and disappeared rapidly in the gathering darkness.

"Was that Adelaide?" Mrs. Mansfield asked herself as she got out.

She was not certain, but she thought the passing figure had looked like Mrs. Shiffney's.

The door of Mullion House stood open, held by a thin woman with very large gray eyes, who smiled at Mrs. Mansfield and made a slight motion, almost as if she mentally dropped a curtsey, but physically refrained out of respect for London ways.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, he is in! He's expecting you."

The emphasis on the last word was marked. Mrs. Mansfield looked at this woman, toward whom at once she felt friendly.

"There's some here and there that would bother him to death, I'm sure, if they was let!" continued the woman, closing the little front door gently. "But it will be a pleasure to him to see you. We all knows that!"

"I'm very glad to hear it!" responded Mrs. Mansfield,

liking this unconventional but very human servant. "Mr. Heath has spoken of my coming, then?"

"I should think so, ma'am. This way, if you please!"

Mrs. Searle, Heath's cook-housekeeper, crossed the little dimly lit hall and walked quickly down a rather long and narrow passage.

"He's in the studio, ma'am," she remarked over her narrow shoulder, sharply turning her head. "Fan is with him."

"Who's Fan? A dog?"

"My little girl, ma'am."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"Not knowing you were there, when the other lady went I sends her in to him for company as he wasn't working. 'Run, Fan!' says I. 'Go and cheer Mr. Heath up, there's a good girl!' I says. I knows very well there's nothing like a child to put you right after you've been worried. They're so simple, aren't they, ma'am? And we're all simple, I b'lieve, at 'eart, though we're ashamed to show it. I'm sure I don't know why!"

As she concluded she opened a door and ushered Mrs. Mansfield into the composer's workroom.

At the far end of it, in a flicker of firelight, Mrs. Mansfield saw him stooping down over a very fair and Saxon-looking child of perhaps three years old, whose head was thickly covered with short yellow hair inclined to be curly, and who was dressed in a white frock with an almost artful blue bow in the front. As Mrs. Mansfield came in the child was holding up to Heath a small naked doll of a rather blurred appearance, and was uttering some explanatory remarks in the uneven but arresting voice that seems peculiar to childhood.

"Mrs. Mansfield, if you please, sir!" said Mrs. Searle. Then, with a change of voice: "Come along, Fan! And bring Masterman with you, there's a good girl! We must get on his clothes or he'll catch cold." (To Mrs. Mansfield.) "You'll excuse her, ma'am, but she's that nat'ral, clothes or no clothes it's all one to her."

Fan turned round, holding Masterman by one leg and staring with bright blue eyes at Mrs. Mansfield. Her countenance expressed a dignified inquiry combined, perhaps, with a

certain amount of very natural surprise at so unseemly an interruption of her strictly private interview with Claude Heath and Masterman. Her left thumb mechanically sought the shelter of her mouth, and it was obvious that she was "sizing up" Mrs. Mansfield with all the caution, if not suspicion, of the female nature in embryo.

Heath took her gently by the shoulder as he came forward, smiling, and propelled her slowly toward the middle of the large dim room.

"Welcome!" he said, holding out his hand. "Yes, Fantail, I quite understand. He's been sick and now he's getting better. Go with mother!"

Fan was exchanged for Mrs. Mansfield and vanished, speaking slowly and continuously about Masterman's internal condition and "the new lydy," while Mrs. Mansfield took off her fur coat and looked around her and at Heath.

"I didn't kiss her," she said, "because I think it's a liberty to kiss one of God's creatures at first sight without a special invitation."

"I know—I know!"

Heath seemed restless. His face was slightly flushed, and his eyes, always full of a peculiar vitality, looked more living even than usual. He glanced at Mrs. Mansfield, then glanced away, almost guiltily, she thought.

"Do come and sit down by the fire. Would you like a cushion?"

"No, thank you! What a nice old settle!"

"Yes, isn't it? I live in this room. Alling, the painter, built it for his studio. The other rooms are tiny."

"What a delightful servant you have!"

"Mrs. Searle—yes. She's a treasure! Humanity breaks out of her whatever the occasion. And my goodness, how she understands men!"

He laughed, but the laugh sounded slightly unnatural.

"Fantail's delightful, too!" he added.

"What is her real name?"

"Fanny. I call her Fantail." He paused. "Well, because I like her, I suppose."

"I know."

There was a moment of silence, in which Mrs. Mansfield glanced about the room. Despite its size it was cozy. It looked as if it were lived in, perpetually and intimately used. There was nothing in it that was very handsome or very valuable, except a fine Steinway grand pianoforte; but there was nothing ugly or vulgar. And there were quantities of books, not covered with repellent glass. They were ranged in dark cases, which furnished the walls, and lay everywhere on tables, among magazines and papers, scores and volumes of songs and loose manuscript music. The piano was open, and there was more music on it. The armchairs were well worn but comfortable, and looked "sat in." Over the windows there were dim orange-colored curtains that looked old but not shabby. On the floor there were some rather good and very effective Oriental rugs. The only flowers in the room were bright yellow tulips, grouped together in a mass on an oak table a long way from the fire. Opposite to the piano there was a large ebony crucifix mounted on a stand, and so placed that anyone seated at the piano faced it. The room was lit not strongly by oil lamps with shades. A few mysterious oil paintings, very dark in color, hung on the walls between the bookcases. Mrs. Mansfield could not discern their subjects. On the high wooden mantelpiece there were a few photographs, of professors and students at the Royal College of Music and of a serious and innocent-looking priest in black coat and round white collar.

To Mrs. Mansfield the room suggested a recluse who liked to be cosy, who, perhaps, was drawn toward mystery, even mysticism, and who loved the life of the brain.

"And you've a garden?" she asked, breaking the little pause.

"The size of a large pocket-handkerchief. I'm not at all rich, you know. But I can just afford my little house and to live without earning a penny."

A woman servant, not Mrs. Searle, came in with tea and retreated, walking very softly and slowly. She looked almost rustic.

"That's my only other servant, Harriet," said Heath, pouring out tea.

"There's something very un-Londony in it all," said Mrs. Mansfield, again looking round, almost with a puzzled air.

"That's what I try for. I'm fond of London in a way, but I can't bear anything typical of London in my home."

"It is quite a home," she said; "and the home of a worker. One gets weary of being received in reception-rooms. This is a retreat."

Heath looked at her with his bright almost too searching and observant eyes.

"I wonder," he said almost reluctantly, "whether—may I talk about myself to-day?" he interrupted himself.

"Do, if you like to."

"I think I should."

"Do, then."

"I wonder whether a man is a coward to raise up barriers between himself and life, whether it is a mistake to have a retreat, as you rightly call this room, this house, and to spend the greater part of one's time alone in it? But"—he moved restlessly—"the real question is whether one ought to let oneself be guided by a powerful instinct."

"I expect one ought to."

"Do you? Oh, you're not eating anything!"

"I will help myself."

"Mrs. Shiffney wouldn't agree with you."

"No."

"Didn't—didn't you see her? She went just before you came."

"I saw someone. I thought it might be Adelaide. I wasn't sure."

"It was she. I hadn't asked her to come and wasn't expecting her."

He stopped, then added abruptly:

"It was wonderfully kind of her to come, though. She is kind and clever, too. She has fascination, I think. . . ."

"I'm sure she has."

"And yet, d'you know, there's something in her, and in lots of people I might get to know, I suppose, through her and Max Elliot, that I—well, I almost hate it."

"What is it?"

"Well, whenever I come across one of them by chance I seem to hear a voice repeating, 'To-morrow we die—to-morrow we die—to-morrow we die.' And I seem to see something inside of them with teeth and claws fastening on pleasure. It's—it's like a sort of minotaur, and it gives me horrors. And yet I might go to it."

Mrs. Mansfield said nothing for a moment. She had finished her cup of tea, and now, with a little gesture, refused to have another.

"It's quite true. There is the creature with teeth and claws, and it is, perhaps, horrible. But it's so sad that I scarcely see anything but its sadness."

"You are kinder than I."

He leaned forward.

"D'you know, I think you're the kindest human being I ever met, except one, that priest up there on the mantelpiece."

"Forgive me," she said, making allowance for herself to-day because of Heath's evident desire to talk intimately, a desire which she believed she ought to help, "but are you a Roman Catholic?"

"Oh, no! I wish I was!"

"But I suppose you can't be?"

"Oh, no! I suppose I'm one of those unsatisfactory people whose soul and whose brain are not in accord. That doesn't make for inward calm or satisfaction. But I can only hope for better days."

There was something uneasy in his speech. She felt the strong reserve in him always fighting against the almost fierce wish to be unreserved with her.

"They will come, surely!" she said. "If you are quite sincere, sincere with yourself always and sincere with others as often as is possible."

"You're right about its not being possible to be always sincere with others."

She smiled.

"They simply wouldn't let you!"

"No," he said. "I feel as if I could be rather sincere with you sometimes."

"Specially to-day, perhaps."

"Yes, I think so. We do get on, don't we?"

"Yes, we do."

"I often wonder why. But we do. I'll move the table if you've really finished."

He put the table away and sat down on the settle beside her, at the far end. And he turned, leaning his back against the upright end, and stretching one arm along the wooden top, on which his long fingers restlessly closed.

"I was sorry I went to Max Elliot's till you came into the room," he said. "And ever since then I've been partly very glad."

"But only partly?"

"Yes, because I've always had an instinctive dread of getting drawn in."

"To the current of our modern art life. I'm sure you mean that."

"I do. And of course Elliot is in the thick of it. Mrs. Shiffney's in it, and all her lot, which I don't know. And that fellow Lane is in it too."

"And I suppose I am in it with Charmian."

Heath looked at the floor. Ignoring Mrs. Mansfield's remark, he continued:

"I have some talent. It isn't the sort of talent to win popularity. Fortunately, I don't desire—in fact, I'm very much afraid of popularity. But as I believe my talent is—is rather peculiar, individual, it might easily become—well, I suppose I may say the rage in a certain set. They might drop me very soon. Probably they would—I don't know. But I have a strong feeling that they'd take me up violently if I gave them a chance. That's what Max Elliot can't help wanting. He's such a good fellow, but he's a born exploiter. Not in any nasty way, of course!" Heath concluded hastily.

"I quite understand."

"And, I don't want to seem conceited, but I see there's something about me that set would probably like. Mrs. Shiffney's showed me that. I have never called upon her. She has sent me several invitations. And to-day she called. She wants me to go with her on *The Wanderer* for a cruise."

"To Wonderland?"

Heath shrugged his shoulders.

"In the Mediterranean, I believe."

"Doesn't that tempt you?"

"Yes, terribly. But I flatly refused to go. But she knew I was tempted. It's only curiosity on her part," he added, with a sort of hot, angry boyishness. "She can't make me out, and I didn't call. That's why she asked me."

Mrs. Mansfield mentally added a "partly" to the last sentence.

"You're very much afraid of exposing yourself—or is it your talent?—to the influence of what we may as well call the world," she said.

"I suppose one's talent is oneself, one's best self."

"Perhaps so. I have none. You know best about that. I expect you are right in being afraid."

"You don't think I'm merely a rather absurd coward and egoist?"

"Oh, no! But some people—many, I think—would say a talent is meant to be used, to be given to the light."

"I know. But I don't think the modern world wants mine. I"—he reddened—"I always set words from the Bible nearly or from the Prayer-Book."

Smiling a little, as if saving something by humor, he added:

"Not the *Song of Solomon*."

"But don't the English—"

He stopped her.

"Good heavens! I know you are thinking of the Handel Festival and *Elijah* in the provinces!" he exclaimed. "I know you are!"

She laughed.

"I should like to play you one or two of my things," he said impulsively. "Then you'll see at once."

He went toward the piano. She sat still. She was with the striking unreserve of the reserved man when he has cast his protector or his demon away. With his back to her Heath turned over some music, moved a pile of sheets, set them down on the floor under the piano, searched.

"Oh, here it is!"

"'THIS IS THE LAST THING I'VE DONE'"—*Page 41*

He grasped some manuscript, put it on the music-stand, and sat down.

"This is the last thing I've done. The words are taken from the sixteenth chapter of Revelation—'And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." ' And so on."

With a sort of anger his hands descended and struck the keys. Speaking through his music he gave Mrs. Mansfield indications of what it was expressing.

"This is the sea. 'The second angel poured out his vial upon the sea, and it became as the blood of a dead man. . . . The fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun, and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. . . . The sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great River Euphrates, and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the Kings of the East might be prepared.' "

The last words which Heath had set were those in the fifteenth verse of the chapter—"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

When he had finished he got up from the piano with a flushed face and, again speaking in a boyish and almost naive manner, said quickly:

"There, that gives you an idea of the sort of thing I do and care about doing. For, of course, I never will attempt any subject that doesn't thoroughly interest me."

He stood for a moment, not looking toward Mrs. Mansfield; then, as if struggling against an inward reluctance, he again sat down on the settle.

"Have you orchestrated it?" she asked.

"Yes. I've just finished the orchestration."

"Surely you want to hear it given with voices and the orchestra? Frankly, I won't believe you if you say you don't."

"I do."

The reluctance seemed to fade out of him.

"The fact is I'm torn between the desire to hear my things and a mighty distaste for publicity."

He sprang up.

"If you'll allow me I'll just give you an idea of my Te Deum. And then I'll have done."

He went once more to the piano.

When he was sitting beside her again Mrs. Mansfield felt shy of him. After a moment she said:

"You are sincere in your music?"

"Yes."

He did not seem specially anxious to get at her exact opinion of his work, and this fact, she scarcely knew why, pleased Mrs. Mansfield.

"I had two or three things done at the College concerts," Heath continued. "I don't think they were much liked. They were considered very clever technically. But what's that? Of course, one must conquer one's means or one can't express oneself at all."

"And now you work quite alone?"

"Yes. I've got just a thousand a year of my own," he said abruptly.

"You are independent, then."

"Yes. It isn't a great deal. Of course, I quite realize that the sort of thing I do could never bring in a penny of money. So I've no money temptation to resist in keeping quiet. There isn't a penny in my compositions. I know that."

Mrs. Mansfield thought, "If he were to get a mystical libretto and write an opera!" But she did not say it. She felt that she would not care to suggest anything to Heath which might indicate a desire on her part to see him "a success." In her ears were perpetually sounding the words, "and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the Kings of the East might be prepared." They took her away from London. They set her in the midst of a great strangeness. They even awoke in her an almost riotous feeling of desire. What she desired she could not have said exactly. Some form of happiness, that was all she knew. But how the thought of happiness stung her soul at that moment! She looked at Heath and said:

"I quite understand about Mrs. Shiffney now."

"Yes?"

"You have the dangerous gift of a very peculiar and very

powerful imagination. I think your music might make you enemies."

Heath looked pleased.

"I'm glad you think that. I know exactly what you mean."

They sat together on the settle and talked for more than an hour. Mrs. Mansfield's feeling of shyness speedily vanished, was replaced by something maternal with which she was much more at ease.

Mrs. Searle let her out. She had said good-bye to Heath in the studio and asked him not to come to the front door.

"Good-night, Mrs. Searle!" she said, with a smile. "I hope I haven't stayed too long?"

"No, indeed, ma'am. I'm sure you'd ado him good. He do like them that's nat'ral. But he don't like to be bothered. And there's people that do keep on, ma'am, isn't there?"

"I daresay there are."

"Specially with a young gentleman, ma'am. I always do say it's the women runs after the men. More shame to us, ma'am."

"Has Fan begun yet?"

Mrs. Searle blushed.

"Well, ma'am, really I don't know. But she's awfully put out if anyone interrupts her when she's with Mr. Heath."

"I must take care what I'm about."

"Oh, ma'am, I'm sure—"

The motor moved away from the little old house. As Mrs. Mansfield looked out she saw a faint gleam in the studio. Involuntarily she listened, almost strained her ears. And she murmured, "And the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the Kings of the East might be prepared."

The gleam was lost in the night. She leaned back and found herself wondering what Charmian would have thought of the music she had just heard.

CHAPTER V

MRS. SHIFFNEY had more money than she knew how to spend, although she was recklessly extravagant. Her mother, who was dead, had been an Austrian Jewess, and from her had come the greater part of Mrs. Shiffney's large personal fortune. Her father, Sir Willy Manning, was still alive, and was a highly cultivated and intelligent Englishman of the cosmopolitan type; Mrs. Shiffney derived her peculiar and attractive look of high breeding and her completely natural manner from him. From her mother she had received the nomadic instinct which kept her perpetually restless, and which often drove her about the world in search of the change and diversion which never satisfied her. Lady Manning had been a feverish traveller and had written several careless and clever books of description. She had died of a fever in Hong-Kong while her husband was in Scotland. Although apparently of an unreserved nature, he had never bemoaned her loss.

Mrs. Shiffney had a husband, a lenient man who loved comfort and who was fond of his wife in an altruistic way. She and he got on excellently when they were together and quite admirably when they were parted, as they very often were, for yachting made Mr. Shiffney feel "remarkably cheap." As he much preferred to feel expensive he had nothing to do with *The Wanderer* unless she lay snug in harbor. His hobby was racing. He was a good horseman, disliked golf, and seldom went out of the British Isles, though he never said that his own country was good enough for him. When he did cross the Channel he visited Paris, Monte Carlo, Homburg, Biarritz, or some place where he was certain to be in the midst of his "pals." The strain of wildness, which made his wife uncommon and interesting, did not exist in him, but he was rather proud of it in her, and had been heard to say more than once, "Addie's a regular gipsy,"

as if the statement were a high compliment. He was a tall, well-built, handsome man of fifty-two, with gray hair and moustache, an agreeable tenor voice, which was never used in singing, and the best-cut clothes in London. Although easily kind he was thoroughly selfish. Everybody had a good word for him, and nobody, who really knew him, ever asked him to perform an unselfish action. "That isn't Jimmy's line" was their restraining thought if they had for a moment contemplated suggesting to Mr. Shiffney that he might perhaps put himself out for a friend. And Jimmy was quite of their opinion, and always stuck to his "line," like a sensible fellow.

Two or three days after Mrs. Shiffney's visit to Claude Heath her husband, late one afternoon, found her in tears.

"What's up, Addie?" he asked, with the sympathy he never withheld from her. "Another gown gone wrong?"

Mrs. Shiffney shook her powerful head, on which was a marvellous black hat crowned with a sort of factory chimney of stiff black plumes.

Mr. Shiffney lit a cigar.

"Poor old Addie!" he said. He leaned down and stroked her shoulder. "I wish you could get hold of somebody or something that'd make you happy," he remarked. "I'm sure you deserve it."

His wife dried her tears and sniffed two or three times almost with the frankness of a grief-stricken child.

"I never shall!"

"Why not, Addie?"

"There's something in me—I don't know! I should get tired of anyone who didn't get tired of me!"

She almost began to cry again, and added despairingly:

"So what hope is there? And I *do* so want to enjoy myself! I wonder if there ever has been a woman who wanted to enjoy herself as much as I do?"

Mr. Shiffney blew forth a cloud of smoke, extending the little finger of the hand which held his cigar.

"We all want to have a good time," he observed. "A first-rate time. What else are we here for?"

He spoke seriously.

"We are here to keep things going, I s'pose—to keep it up, don't you know? We mustn't let it run down. But if we don't enjoy ourselves down it goes. And that doesn't do, does it?"

He flicked the ash from his cigar.

"What's the special row this time?" he continued, without any heated curiosity, but with distinct sympathy.

Mrs. Shiffney looked slightly more cheerful. She enjoyed telling things if the things were closely connected with herself.

"Well, I want to start for a cruise," she began. "I can't remain for ever glued to Grosvenor Square. I must move about and see something."

She had just been for a month in Paris.

"Of course. What are we here for?" observed her husband.

"You always understand! Sit down, you old thing!"

Mr. Shiffney sat down, gently pulling up his trousers.

"And the row is," she continued, shaking her shoulders, "that I want Claude Heath to come and he won't. And, since he won't, he's really the only living man I want to have on the cruise."

"Who is he?" observed Mr. Shiffney. "I've never heard of him. Is he one of your special pals?"

"Not yet. I met him at Max's. He's a composer, and I want to know what he's like."

"I expect he's like all the rest."

"No, he isn't!" she observed decisively.

"Why won't he come? Perhaps he's a bad sailor."

"He didn't even trouble himself to say that. He was in such a hurry to refuse that he didn't bother about an excuse. And this afternoon he called, when I was in, and never asked for me, only left cards and bolted, although I had been to his house to ask him to come on *The Wanderer*."

"Afraid of you, is he?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. He's never been among *us*."

"Poor chap! But surely that's a reason for him to want to get in?"

"Wouldn't you think so? Wouldn't anyone think so? The way I'm bombarded! But he seems only anxious to keep out of everything."

"A pose very likely."

"I don't believe it is."

"I leave it to you. No one sharper in London. Is he a gentleman—all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, of course!"

Mr. Shiffney pulled up his trousers a little more, exposing a pair of striped silk socks which emerged from shining boots protected by white spats.

"To be sure. If he hadn't been he'd have jumped at you and *The Wanderer*."

"Naturally. I shan't go at all now! What an unlucky woman I always am!"

"You never let anyone know it."

"Well, Jimmy, I'm not quite a fool. Be down on your luck and not a soul will stay near you."

"I should think not. Why should they? One wants a bit of life, not to hear people howling and groaning all about one. It's awful to be with anyone who's under the weather."

"Ghastly! I can't stand it! But, all the same, it's a fearful *corvée* to keep it up when you're persecuted as I am."

"Poor old Addie!"

Mr. Shiffney threw his cigar into the grate reflectively and lightly touched his moustaches, which were turned upward, but not in a military manner.

"Things never seem quite right for you," he continued.

"And other women have such a splendid time!" she exclaimed. "The disgusting thing is that he goes all the while to Violet Mansfield."

"She's dull enough and quite old too."

"No, she isn't dull. You're wrong there."

"I daresay. She doesn't amuse me."

"She's not your sort."

"Too feverish, too keen, brainy in the wrong way. I like brains, mind you, and I know where they are. But I don't see the fun of having them jumped at one."

"He does, apparently, unless it's really Charmian."

"The girl? She's not bad. Wants to be much cleverer than she is, of course, like pretty nearly all the girls, except the sporting lot; but not bad."

"Jimmy"—Mrs. Shiffney's eyes began once more to look audacious—"shall I ask Charmian Mansfield to come on the yacht?"

"You think that might bring him? Why not ask both of them?"

"No; I won't have the mother!"

"Why not?"

"Because I won't!"

"The best of reasons, too."

"You understand us better than any man in London."

She sat reflecting. She was beginning to look quite cheerful.

"It would be rather fun," she resumed, after a minute. "Charmian Mansfield, Max—if he can get away—Paul Lane. It isn't the party I'd thought of, but still—"

"Which of them were you going to take?"

"Never mind."

"I don't. And where did you mean to go?"

"I told him to the Mediterranean."

"But it wasn't!"

"Oh, I don't know! Where can one go? That's another thing. It's always the same old places, unless one has months to spare, and then one gets bored with the people one's asked. Things are so difficult."

"One place is very much like another."

"To you. But I always hope for an adventure round the corner."

"I've been round a lot of corners in my time, but I might almost as well have stuck to the club."

"Of course *you* might!"

She got up.

"I must think about Charmian," she said, as she went casually out of the room.

Mrs. Shiffney turned the new idea over and over in her restless mind, which was always at work in a desultory but often clever way. She could not help being clever. She had never studied, never applied herself, never consciously tried to master anything, but she was quick-witted, had always lived among brilliant and highly cultivated people, had seen everything, been everywhere, known everyone, looked into all the

books that had been talked about, cast at least a glance at all the pictures which had made any stir. And she gathered impressions swiftly, and, moreover, had a natural flair for all that was first-rate, original, or strange. As she was quite independent in mind, and always took her own line, she had become an arbiter, a leader of taste. What she liked soon became liked in London and Paris throughout a large circle. Unfortunately, she was changeable and apt to be governed by personal feeling in matters connected with art. When she cast away an artist she generally cast away his art with him. If it was first-rate she did not condemn it as bad. She contented herself with saying that she was "sick of it." And very soon a great many of her friends, and their friends, were sick of it, too. She was a quicksand because she was a singularly complete egoist. But very few people who met her failed to come under the spell of her careless charm, and many, because she had much impulse, swore that she had a large heart. Only to her husband, and occasionally, in a fit of passion, to someone who she thought had treated her badly, did she show a lachrymose side of her nature. She was noted for her gaiety and *joie de vivre* and for the energy with which she pursued enjoyment. Her cynicism did not cut deep, her irony was seldom poisoned. She spoke well of people, and was generous with her money. With her time she was less generous. She was not of those who are charitable with their golden hours. "I can't be bothered!" was the motto of her life. And wise people did not bother her.

She had seen that, for a moment, Claude Heath had been tempted by the invitation to the cruise. A sudden light had gleamed in his eyes, and her swift apprehension had gathered something of what was passing in his imagination. But almost immediately the light had vanished and the quick refusal had come. And she knew that it was a refusal which she could not persuade him to cancel unless she called someone to her assistance. His austerity, which attracted her whimsical and unscrupulous nature, fought something else in him and conquered. But the something else, if it could be revived, given new strength, would make a cruise with him, even to all the old places, quite interesting, Mrs. Shiffney thought. And

any refusal always made her greedy and obstinate. "I *will* have it!" was the natural reply of her nature to any "You can't have it!"

She often acted impulsively, hurried by caprices and desires, and that same evening she sent the following note to Charmian:

GROSVENOR SQUARE,
Thursday.

DEAR CHARMIAN,—You've never been on the yacht, though I've always been dying to have you come. I've been glued to London for quite a time, and am getting sick of it. Aren't you? Always the same things and people. I feel I must run away if I can get up a pleasant party to elope with me. Will you be one? I thought of starting some time next month on *The Wanderer* for a cruise, to the Mediterranean or somewhere. I don't know yet who'll tuck in, but I shall take Susan Fleet to play chaperon to us and the crew and manage things. Max Elliot may come, and I thought of trying to get your friend, Mr. Heath, though I hardly know him. I think he works too hard, and a breeze might do him good. However, it's all in the air. Tell me what you think about it. Love to the beautiful mother.—In tearing haste, Yours,

ADELAIDE SHIFFNEY.

"Why has she asked me?" said Charmian to herself, laying this note down after reading it twice.

She had always known Mrs. Shiffney, but she had never before been asked to go on a cruise in the yacht. Mrs. Shiffney had always called her Charmian, as she called Mrs. Mansfield Violet. But there had never been even a hint of genuine intimacy between the girl and the married woman, and they seldom met except in society, and then only spoke a few casual and unmeaning words. They had little in common, Charmian supposed, except their mutual knowledge of quantities of people and of a certain social life.

Claude Heath on *The Wanderer!*

Charmian took the note to her mother.

"Mrs. Shiffney has suddenly taken a fancy to me, Madretta," she said. "Look at this!"

Mrs. Mansfield read the note and gave it back.

"Do you want to go?" she asked, looking at the girl, not without a still curiosity.

Charmian twisted her lips.

"I don't know. You see, it's all very vague. I should like to be sure who's going. I think it's very reckless to take any chances on a yacht."

"Claude Heath isn't going."

Charmian raised her eyebrows.

"But has she asked him?"

"Yes. And he's refused. He told me so on Monday."

"You're quite sure he won't go?"

"He said he wasn't going."

Charmian looked lightly doubtful.

"Shall I go?" she said. "Would you mind if I did?"

"Do you really want to?"

"I don't think I care much either way. Why has she asked me?"

"Adelaide? I daresay she likes you. And you wouldn't be unpleasant on a yacht, would you?"

"That depends, I expect. You'd allow me to go?"

"If I knew who the rest of the party were to be—definitely."

"I won't answer till to-morrow."

Mrs. Mansfield did not feel sure what was Charmian's desire in the matter. She did not quite understand her child. She wondered, too, why Mrs. Shiffney had asked Charmian to go on the yacht, why she implied that Claude Heath might make one of the party when he had refused to go. It occurred to Mrs. Mansfield that Adelaide might mean to use Charmian as a lure to draw Heath into the expedition. But, if so, surely she quite misunderstood the acquaintanceship between them. Heath was her—Mrs. Mansfield's—friend. How often she had wished that Charmian and he were more at ease together, liked each other better. It was odd that Adelaide should fall into such a mistake. And yet what other meaning could her note have? She wrote as if the question of Heath's going or not were undecided.

Was it undecided? Did Adelaide, with her piercing and clever eyes, see more clearly into Heath's nature than Mrs. Mansfield could?

Mrs. Shiffney had an extraordinary capacity for getting what she wanted. The hidden tragedy of her existence was that she was never satisfied with what she got. She wanted to draw Claude Heath out of his retirement into the big current of life by which she and her friends were buoyantly carried along through changing and brilliant scenes. His refusal had no doubt hardened a mere caprice into a strong desire. Mrs. Mansfield realized that Adelaide would not leave Heath alone now. The note to Charmian showed an intention not abandoned. But why should Adelaide suppose that Heath's acceptance might be dependent on anything done by Charmian?

Mrs. Mansfield knew well, and respected, Mrs. Shiffney's haphazard cleverness, which, in matters connected with the worldly life, sometimes almost amounted to genius. That note to Charmian gave a new direction to her thoughts, set certain subtleties of the past which had vaguely troubled her in a new and stronger light. She awaited, with an interest that was not wholly pleasant, Charmian's decision of the morrow.

Charmian had been very casual in manner when she came to her mother with the surprising invitation. She was almost as casual on the following morning when she entered the dining-room where Mrs. Mansfield was breakfasting by electric light. For a gloom as of night hung over the Square, although it was ten o'clock.

"Have you been thinking it over, Charmian?" said her mother, as the girl sat languidly down.

"Yes, mother—lazily."

She sipped her tea, looking straight before her with a cold and dreamy expression.

"Have you been active enough to arrive at any conclusion?"

"I got up quite undecided, but now I think I'll say 'Yes,' if you don't mind. When I looked out of the window this morning I felt as if the Mediterranean would be nicer than this. There's only one thing—why don't you come, too?"

"I haven't been asked."

"And why not?"

"Adelaide's too modern to ask mothers and daughters together," said Mrs. Mansfield, smiling.

"Would you go if she asked you?"

"No. Well, now the thing is to find out what the party is to be. Write the truth, and say you'll go if I know who's to be there and allow you to go. Adelaide knows quite well she has lots of friends I shouldn't care for you to yacht with. And it's much better to be quite frank about it. If Susan Fleet and Max go, you can go."

"I believe you are really the frankest person in London. And yet people love you—miracle-working mother!"

Charmian turned the conversation to other subjects and seemed to forget all about *The Wanderer*. But when breakfast was over, and she was alone before her little Chippendale writing-table, she let herself go to her excitement. Although she loved, even adored her mother, she sometimes acted to her. To do so was natural to Charmian. It did not imply any diminution of love or any distrust. It was but an instinctive assertion of a not at all uncommon type of temperament. The coldness and the dreaminess were gone now, but her excitement was mingled with a great uncertainty.

On receiving Mrs. Shiffney's note Charmian had almost instantly understood why she had been asked on the cruise. Her instinct had told her, for she had at that time known nothing of Heath's refusal. She had supposed that he had not yet been invited. Mrs. Shiffney had invited her not for herself, but as a means of getting hold of Heath. Charmian was positive of that. Months ago, in Max Elliot's music-room, the girl had divined the impression made by Heath on Mrs. Shiffney, had seen the restless curiosity awake in the older woman. She had even noticed the tightening of Mrs. Shiffney's lips when she, Charmian, had taken Heath away from the little group by the fire, with that "when you've quite done with my only mother," which had been a tiny slap given to Mrs. Shiffney. And she had been sure that Mrs. Shiffney meant to know Heath. She had a great opinion of Mrs. Shiffney's social cleverness and audacity. Most girls who were much in London society had. She did not really like Mrs. Shiffney, or want to be intimate with her, but she thoroughly believed in her flair, and that was why the note had stirred in Charmian excitement and uncertainty. If Mrs.

Shiffney thought she saw something, surely it was there. She would not take shadow for substance.

But might she not fire a shot in the dark on the chance of hitting something?

"Why did she ask me instead of mother?" Charmian said to herself again and again. "If she had got mother to go Claude Heath would surely have gone. Why should he go because I go?"

And then came the thought, "She thinks he may, perhaps thinks he will. Will he? Will he?"

The note had abruptly changed an opinion long held by Charmian. Till it came she had believed that Claude Heath secretly disliked, perhaps even despised her. Mrs. Shiffney on half a sheet of note-paper had almost reassured her. But now would come the test. She would accept; Mrs. Shiffney would ask Claude Heath again, telling him she was to be of the party. And then what would Heath do?

As she wrote her answer Charmian said to herself, "If he accepts Mrs. Shiffney was right. If he refuses again I was right."

She sent the note to Grosvenor Square by a boy messenger, and resigned herself to a period of patience.

CHAPTER VI

BY return there came a note hastily scribbled:

"Delighted. I will let you know all the particulars in a day or two.—A. S."

But two days, three days, a week passed by, and Charmian heard nothing more. She grew restless, but concealed her restlessness from her mother, who asked no questions. Claude Heath did not come to the house. As they never met him in society they did not see him at all, except now and then by chance at a concert or theater, unless he came to see them. Excited by Mrs. Mansfield's visit to him, he was much shut in, composing. There were days when he never went out of his little house, and only refreshed himself now and then by a game with Fan or a conversation with Mrs. Searle. When he was working really hard he disliked seeing friends, and felt a strange and unkind longing to push everybody out of his life. He was, therefore, strongly irritated one afternoon, eight days after Charmian had written her note of conditional acceptance to Mrs. Shiffney, when his parlor-maid, Harriet, after two or three knocks, which made a well planned and carried out crescendo, came into the studio with the announcement that a lady wished to see him.

"Harriet, you know I can't see anyone!" he exclaimed.

He was at the piano, and had been in the midst of exciting himself by playing before sitting down to work.

"Sir," almost whispered Harriet in her very refined voice, "she heard you playing, and knew you were in."

"Oh, is it Mrs. Mansfield?"

"No, sir, the lady who called the other day just before that lady came."

Claude Heath frowned and lifted his hands as if he were going to hit out at the piano.

"Where is she?" he said in a low voice.

"In the drawing-room, sir."

"All right, Harriet. It isn't your fault."

He got up in a fury and went to the tiny drawing-room, which he scarcely ever used unless some visitor came. Mrs. Shiffney was standing up in it, looking, he thought, very smart and large and audacious, bringing upon him, so he felt as he went in, murmurs and lights from a distant world with which he had nothing to do.

"How angry you are with me!" she said, lifting her veil and smiling with a careless assurance. "Your eyes are quite blazing with fury."

Claude, in spite of himself, grew red and all his body felt suddenly stiff.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "But I was working, and—"

He touched her powerful hand.

"You had sprouted your oak, and I have forced it. I know it's much too bad of me."

He saw that she could not believe she was wholly unwanted by such a man as he was, in such a little house as he had. People always wanted her. Her frankness in running after him showed him her sense of her position, her popularity, her attraction. How could she think she was undignified? No doubt she thought him an oddity who must be treated unconventionally. He felt savage, but he felt flattered.

"I'll show her what I am!" was his thought.

Yet already, as he begged her to sit down on one of his chintz-covered chairs, he felt a sort of reluctant pleasure in being with her.

"May I give you some tea?"

Her hazel eyes still seemed to him full of laughter. Evidently she regarded him as a boy.

"No, thank you! I won't be so cruel as to accept."

"But really, I am—"

"No, no, you aren't. Never mind! We'll be good friends some day. And I know how artists with tempers hate to be interrupted."

"I hope my temper is not especially bad," said Claude, stiffening with sudden reserve.

"I think it's pretty bad, but I don't mind. What a dear, funny little room! But you never sit in it."

"Not often."

"I long to see your very own room. But I'm not going to ask you."

There was a slight pause. Again the ironical light came into her eyes.

"You're wondering quite terribly why I've come here again," she said. "It's about the yacht."

"I'm really so very sorry that—"

"I know, just as I am when I'm refusing all sorts of invitations that I'd rather die than accept. Slipshod, but you know what I mean. You hate the idea. I'm only just going to tell you my party, so that you may think it over and see if you don't feel tempted."

"I am tempted."

"But you'd rather die than come. I perfectly understand. I often feel just like that. We shall be very few. Susan Fleet—she's a sort of chaperon to me; being a married woman, I need a chaperon, of course—Max Elliot, Mr. Lane, perhaps—if he can't come some charming man whom you'd delight in—and Charmian Mansfield."

Again there was a pause. Then Heath said:

"It's very, very kind of you to care to have me come."

"I know it is. I am a kind-hearted woman. And now for where we'll go."

"I really am most awfully sorry, but I'm obliged to stick to work."

"We might go down along the Riviera as far as Genoa, and then run over to Sicily and Tunis."

She saw his eyes beginning to shine.

"Or we might go to the Greek Islands and Smyrna and Constantinople. It's rather early for Constantinople, though, but perfect for Egypt. We could leave the yacht at Alexandria—"

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Shiffney, and I hope you'll have a splendid cruise. But I really can't come much as I want to. I have to work."

"When you say that you look all chin! How terribly determined you are not to enjoy life!"

"It isn't that at all."

"How terribly determined you are not to know life. And I always thought artists, unless they wished to be provincial in their work, claimed the whole world as their portion, all experience as their right. But I suppose *English* artists are different. I often wonder whether they are wise in clinging like limpets to the Puritan tradition. On the Continent, you know, in Paris, Berlin, Rome, Milan, and, above all, in Moscow and Petersburg, they are regarded with pity and amazement. Do forgive me! But artists abroad, and I speak universally, though I know it's generally dangerous to do that, think art is strangled by the Puritan tradition clinging round poor old England's throat."

She laughed and moved her shoulders.

"They say how can men be great artists unless they steep themselves in the stream of life."

"There are sacred rivers like the Ganges, and there are others that are foul and weedy and iridescent with poison," said Heath hotly.

She saw anger in his eyes.

"Perhaps you are getting something—some sacred cantata—ready for one of the provincial festivals?" she said. "If that is so, of course, you mustn't break the continuity with a trip to the Greek Islands or Tunis. Besides, you'd get all the wrong sort of inspiration in such places. I shall never forget the beautiful impression I received at—was it Worcester?—once when I saw an English audience staggering slowly to its feet in tribute to the Hallelujah Chorus. I am sure you are writing something that will bring Worcester to its feet, aren't you?"

He forced a very mirthless laugh.

"I'm really not writing anything of that kind. But please don't let us talk about my work. I am sure it's very uninteresting except to me. I feel very grateful to you for your kind and delightful offer, but I can't accept it, unfortunately for me."

"*Mal-au-cœur?*"

"Yes, yes. I don't think I'm a good sailor."

"*Mal-au-cœur!*" she repeated, smiling satirically at him. "I'm in the midst of something."

"The Puritan tradition?"

"Perhaps it is that. Whatever it is, I suppose it suits me; it's in my line, so I had better stick to it."

"You are bathing in the Ganges?"

Her eyes were fixed upon him.

"Poor Charmian Mansfield! Whom can I get for her?"

Claude looked down.

"I must leave that to you. I am sure you will have a very delightful party."

Mrs. Shiffney got up. She was looking the soul of careless good-nature, and quite irresistible, though very Roman.

"I don't believe in hurried negatives," she said. "That sounds like a solemn photographer laying down the law, doesn't it? But I don't. I'll give you till Sunday to think it quietly over. Write and let me know on Sunday. Till then I'll keep one of the best cabins open for you. No berths, all beds! Myself, Charmian Mansfield, Susan Fleet, Max Elliot, Paul Lane, and you—I still hope. Good-bye! Thank you for being kind to me. I love to be well received. I'm a horribly sensitive woman, really, though I don't look it. I curl up at a touch, or because I don't get one!"

Claude tried to reiterate that he could not possibly get away, but something in the expression of her eyes made him feel that to do so just then would be to play the child, or, worse, the fool to this woman of the world. As she got into her motor she said:

"A note on Sunday. Don't forget!"

The machine purred. He saw a hand in a white glove carelessly waved. She was gone. The light of that other world faded; its murmurs died down. He went back to his studio. He sat down at the piano. He played; he tried to excite himself. The effort was vain. A sort of horror of the shut-in life had suddenly come upon him, of the life of the brain, or of the spirit, or of both, which he had been living, if not with content at least with ardor—a stronger thing than content. He felt unmanly, absurd. All sense of personal dignity and masculine self-satisfaction had fled from him. He was furious with himself for being so sensitive. Why should he care, even for half an hour, what Mrs. Shiffney

thought of him? But there was within him—and he knew it—a surely weak inclination to give people what they wanted, or expected of him, when he was, or had just been, with them. Strangely enough it lay in his nature side by side with an obstinate determination to do what he chose, to be what he intended to be. These badly-assorted companions fought and kept him restless. They prevented him from working now. And at last he left the piano, put on hat and coat, and started for a walk in the evening darkness.

He felt less irritated, even happier, when he was out in the air.

How persistent Mrs. Shiffney had been! He still felt flattered by her persistence, not because he was a snob and was aware of her influential position and great social popularity, but because he was a young unknown man, and she had troops of friends, battalions of acquaintances. She could get anyone she liked to go on the yacht, and she wanted him. It was flattering to his masculine vanity. He felt that there was something in him which stretched out and caught at people, without intention on his part, which grasped and held them. It was not his talent, he told himself, for he kept that in the dark. It was himself. Although he was less conceited than the average Englishman of talent, for a few minutes he braced his legs and had the cordial conquering sensation.

He had till Sunday to decide.

How absurd to say that to himself when he had decided, told Mrs. Shiffney, and even told Mrs. Mansfield, his great friend! There was really no reason why he should send any note on Sunday. He had refused again and again. That ought to be enough for Mrs. Shiffney, for any woman. But, of course, he would write, lest he should seem heedless or impolite.

What a bore that strong instinct within him was, that instinct which kept him, as it were, moored in a sheltered cove when he might ride the great seas, and possibly with buoyant success! Perhaps he was merely a coward, a rejector of life's offerings.

Well, he had till Sunday.

Claude was a gentleman, but not of aristocratic birth. His people were Cornish, of an old and respected Cornish family, but quite unknown in the great world. They were very clan-

nish, were quite satisfied with their position in their own county, were too simple and too well-bred to share any of the vulgar instincts and aspirations of the climber. Comfortably off, they had no aching desire to be richer than they were, to make any splash. The love of ostentation is not a Cornish vice. The Heaths were homely people, hospitable, warm-hearted, and contented without being complacent. Claude had often felt himself a little apart from them, yet he derived from them and inherited, doubtless, much from them of character, of sentiment, of habit. He was of them and not of them. But he liked their qualities well in his soul, although he felt that he could not live quite as they did, or be satisfied with what satisfied them.

Although he had lived for some years in London he had never tried, or even thought of trying, to push his way into what are called "the inner circles." He had assiduously cultivated his musical talent, but never with a view to using it as a means of opening shut doors. He knew comparatively few people, and scarcely any who were "in the swim," who were written of in social columns, whose names were on the lips of the journalists and of the world. He never thought about his social position as compared with that of others. Accustomed to being a gentleman, he did not want to be more or other than he was. Had he been poor the obligation to struggle might have roused within him the instinct to climb. A forced activity might have bred in him the commoner sort of ambition. But he had enough money and could gratify his inclination toward secrecy and retirement. For several years, since he had left the Royal College of Music and settled down in his little house, he had been happy enough in his sheltered and perhaps rather selfish existence. Dwelling in the center of a great struggle for life, he had enjoyed it because he had had nothing to do with it. His own calm had been agreeably accentuated by the turmoil which surrounded and enclosed it. How many times had he blessed his thousand a year, that armor of gold with which fate had provided him! How often had he imagined himself stripped of it, realized mentally the sudden and fierce alteration in his life and eventually, no doubt, in himself that must follow if poverty came!

He had a horror of the jealousies, the quarrels, the hatreds, the lies, the stabbings in the dark that make too often hideous, despicable, and terrible a world that should be very beautiful. During his musical education he had seen enough to realize that side by side with great talent, with a warm impulse toward beauty, with an ardor that counts labor as nothing, or as delight, may exist coldness, meanness, the tendency to slander, egoism almost inhuman in its concentration, the will to climb over the bodies of the fallen, the tyrant's mind, and the stony heart of the cruel. Art, so it seemed to Claude, often hardened instead of softening the nature of man. That, no doubt, was because artists were generally competitors. Actors, writers, singers, conductors, composers were pitted against each other. The world that should be calm, serene, harmonious, and perfectly balanced became a cock-pit, raucous with angry voices, dabbled with blood, and strewn with the torn feathers of the fallen.

The many books which he had read dealing with the lives of great artists, sometimes their own autobiographies, had only confirmed him in his wish to keep out of the struggle. Such books, deeply interesting though they were, often made him feel almost sick at heart. As he read them he saw genius slipping, or even wallowing in pits full of slime. Men showered their gold out of blackness. They rose on strong pinions only to sink down below the level surely of even the average man. And angry passions attended them along the pilgrimage of their lives, seemed born and bred of their very being. Few books made Claude feel so sad as the books which chronicled the genius of men submitted to the conditions which prevail in the ardent struggle for life.

He closed them, and was happy with his own quiet fate, his apparently humdrum existence, which provided no material for any biographer, the fate of the unknown man who does not wish to be known.

But, of course, there was in him, as there is in almost every man of strong imagination and original talent, a restlessness like that of the physically strong man who has never tried and proved his strength in any combat.

Mrs. Shiffney had appealed to his restlessness, which had

driven Claude forth into the darkness of evening and now companioned him along the London ways. He knew no woman of her type well, and something in him instinctively shrank from her type. As he had said to Mrs. Mansfield, he dreaded, yet he was aware that he might be fascinated by, the monster with teeth and claws always watchful and hungry for pleasure. And the voice that murmured, "To-morrow we die! To-morrow we die!" was like a groan in his ears. But now, as he walked, he was almost inclined to scold his imagination as a companion which led him into excesses, to rebel against his own instinct. Why should he refuse any pleasant temptation that came in his way? Why should he decline to go on the yacht? Was he not a prude, a timorous man to be so afraid for his own safety, not of body, but of mind and soul? Mrs. Shiffney's remarks about Continental artists stuck in his mind. Ought he not to fling off his armor, to descend boldly into the mid-stream of life, to let it take him on its current whither it would?

He was conscious that if once he abandoned his cautious existence he might respond to many calls which, as yet, had not appealed to him. He fancied that he was one of those natures which cannot be half-hearted, which cannot easily mingle, arrange, portion out, take just so much of this and so much of that. The recklessness that looked out of Mrs. Shiffney's eyes spoke to something in him that might be friendly to it, though something else in him disliked, despised, almost dreaded it.

He had answered. Yet on Sunday he must answer again. How he wished Mrs. Shiffney had not called upon him a second time! In her persistence he read her worldly cleverness. She divined the instability which he now felt within him. It must be so. It was so. The first time he had met her he had had a feeling as if to her almost impertinent eyes he were transparent. And she had evidently seen something he had supposed to be hidden, something he wished were not in existence.

Her remarks about English musicians, her banter about the provincial festivals had stung him. The word "provincial" rankled. If it applied to him, to his talent! If he

were merely provincial and destined to remain so because of his way of life!

Abruptly he became solicitous of opinion. He thought of Mrs. Mansfield, and wondered what had been her opinion of his music. Almost mechanically he crossed the broad road by the Marble Arch, turned into the windings of Mayfair, and made his way to Berkeley Square.

"I'll ask her. I'll find out!" was his thought.

He rang Mrs. Mansfield's bell.

"Is Mrs. Mansfield at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is she alone?"

"Yes, sir."

Heath stepped in quickly. He still felt excited, uncertain of himself, even self-conscious under the eyes of the butler. There was no one in the drawing-room. As he waited he wondered whether Charmian was in the house, whether he would see her. And now, for the first time, he began to wonder also why Mrs. Shiffney had made so much of the fact that Charmian was to be on the yacht. He recalled her words, "Poor Charmian Mansfield! Whom can I get for her?" Had he been asked on Charmian's account? That seemed to him very absurd. She certainly disliked him. They were not en rapport. In the yacht they would be thrown together incessantly. He thought of the expression in Mrs. Shiffney's eyes and felt positive that she had pressed him to come for herself. But possibly she fancied he liked Charmian because he came so often to Berkeley Square. The cleverest woman, it seemed, made mistakes. But he could not quite understand Mrs. Shiffney's proceedings. If he did, after all, go on the yacht it would be rather amusing to study her. And Charmian? Heath said to himself that he did not want to study her. She was too uncertain, not without a certain fascination perhaps, but too ironic, too something. He scarcely knew what it was that he disliked, almost dreaded, in her. She was mischievous at wrong moments. The minx peeped up in her and repelled him. She watched him in surely a hostile way and did not understand him. So he was on the defensive with her, never quite at his ease.

The door opened and Mrs. Mansfield came in. Heath went toward her and took her hands eagerly. This evening he felt less independent than he usually did, and in need of a real friend.

"What is it?" she said, after a look at him.

"Why should it be anything special?"

"But it is!"

He laughed almost uneasily.

"I wish I hadn't a face that gives me away always!" he exclaimed. "Though to you I don't mind very much. Well, I wanted to ask you two or three things, if I may."

Mrs. Mansfield sat down on her favorite sofa, with her feet on a stool.

"Anything," she said.

"Do you mind telling me exactly what you thought of my music the other evening? Did you—did you think it feeble stuff? Did you, perhaps, think it"—he paused—"provincial?" he concluded, with an effort.

"Provincial!"

Heath was answered, but he persisted.

"What did you think?"

"I thought it alarming."

"Alarming?"

"Disturbing. It has disturbed me."

"Disturbed your mind?"

"Or my heart, perhaps."

"But why? How?"

"I'm not sure that I could tell you that."

Heath sat down. When he was not composing or playing he sometimes felt very uncertain of himself, lacking in self-confidence. He often had moments when he felt not merely doubtful as to his talent, but as if he were less in almost every way than the average man. He endeavored to conceal this disagreeable weakness, which he suffered under and despised, but could not rid himself of; and in consequence his manner was sometimes uneasy. It was rather uneasy now. He longed to be reassured. Mrs. Mansfield found him strangely different from the man who had played to her, who had scarcely seemed to care what she thought, what anyone thought of his music.

"I do wish you would try to tell me!" he said anxiously.

"Why should you care what I think?" she said, almost as if in rebuke.

"Perhaps my music is terrible rubbish!"

"It certainly is not, or it could not have made a strong impression upon me."

"It did really make a strong impression?"

"Very strong."

"Then you think I have something in me worth developing, worth taking care of?"

"I am sure you have."

"I wonder how I ought to live?" he exclaimed.

"Is that what you came to ask me?"

Her fiery eyes seemed to search him. She sat very still, looking intensely alive.

"To-night I feel as if I didn't know, didn't know at all! You see, I avoid so many things, so many experiences that I might have."

"Do you?"

"Yes. I think I've done that for years. I know I'm doing it now."

He moved restlessly.

"Mrs. Shiffney has asked me again to go yachting with her."

"But I thought you had refused."

"I did. But she has been again to-day. She says your daughter is going."

"Charmian has been asked."

"Mrs. Shiffney said she had accepted the invitation."

"Yes."

"And now I'm to give my answer on Sunday."

"You seem quite upset about it," she said, without sarcasm.

"Of course it seems a small matter. People would laugh at me, I know, for worrying. But what I feel is that if I go with Mrs. Shiffney, or go to Max Elliot's parties, I shall very soon be drawn into a life quite different from the one I have always led. And I do think it matters very much to—to some people just how they live, whom they know well, and so on. Men say, of course, that a man ought to face the rough and tumble of life. And some women say a man ought to welcome every experience. I wonder what the truth is?"

Still with her eyes on him, Mrs. Mansfield said:

"Follow your instinct."

"Can't one have conflicting instincts?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then one's instinct may not be strong enough to make itself known."

"I doubt that."

"But I am a man, you a woman. Women are said to have stronger instincts than men."

"Aren't you playing with your own convictions?"

"Am I?"

He stared at her, but for a moment his eyes looked unconscious of her.

"Mrs. Shiffney said something to me that struck me," he said presently. "She implied that experiences of all kinds are the necessary food for anyone who wishes to be at all a big artist. She evidently thinks that England has failed to produce great musicians because the English are hampered by tradition."

"She thinks uncleanliness necessary to the producing of beauty perhaps!"

"Ah, I believe you have put into words what I have been thinking!"

"Is it wisdom to grope for stars in the mud?"

"No, no! It can't be!"

He was silent. Then he said:

"St Augustine, and many others, went through mud to the stars though."

"St. Francis didn't—if we are to talk of the saints."

"I believe you could guide me."

Mrs. Mansfield looked deeply touched. For an instant tears glistened in her eyes. Nevertheless, her next remark was almost sternly uncompromising.

"Even if I could, don't let me."

"Why?"

"I want the composer of the music I heard at the little house to be very strong in every way. No, no; I am not going to try to guide you, my friend!"

There was a sound in her voice as if she were speaking to herself.

"I never met anyone so capable of comradeship—no woman, I mean—as you."

"That's a compliment I like!"

At this moment the door opened and Charmian came in, wrapped in furs, her face covered by a veil. When she saw Heath with her mother she pushed the veil up rather languidly.

"Oh, Mr. Heath! We haven't seen you for ages. What have you been about?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Haven't you?"

"Take off that thick coat, Charmian, and come and talk to us."

"Shall I?"

She unbuttoned the fur slowly. Claude helped her to take it off. As she emerged he thought, "How slim she is!" He had often before looked at girls and wondered at their slimness, and thought that it seemed part of their mystery. It both attracted and repelled him.

"Are you talking of very interesting things?" she asked, coming toward the fire.

"I hear you are going for a cruise with Mrs. Shiffney," said Claude, uneasily.

"I believe I am. It would be rather nice to get out of this weather. But you don't mind it."

"How can you know that?"

"It's very simple, almost as simple as some of Sherlock Holmes's deductions. You have refused the cruise which I have accepted. I expect you were right. No doubt one might get terribly bored on a yacht, unable to get away from people. I almost wonder that I dared to say 'Yes!' "

"Where are you going to sit, Charmian?" said Mrs. Mansfield.

"Dearest mother, I'm afraid I must go upstairs. I've got to try on coats and skirts."

She turned toward Heath.

"The voyage, you know. I wish you could have come!"

She held out her thin hand, smiling. She was looking very serene, very sure of herself.

"I'm to answer Mrs. Shiffney on Sunday," said Heath abruptly.

Something in Charmian's voice and manner had made him feel defiant.

"Oh, I thought you had answered! Is Sunday your day for making up your mind?"

Before he could reply she went out of the room slowly, smiling.

CHAPTER VII

ON the following Sunday night at ten o'clock Max Elliot gave one of his musical parties.

Delia had long since emerged from her rest cure, but was still suffering severely from its after-effects. It had completely broken her down, poor thing. The large quantities of "Marella" which she had imbibed had poisoned the system. The Swedish massage had made her bulky. And the prohibition as to letters had so severely shaken her nerve ganglions that she had been forced to seek the strengthening air of an expensive Swiss altitude, from which she had only just returned by way of Paris, where she had been nearly finished off by the dressmakers. However, being a woman of courage, she was down in peach color, with a pale turquoise-blue waist-belt, to receive her guests and to help to make things cheery. And she devoured condolences with an excellent appetite.

"Whatever you do, never touch 'Marella'!" she was saying in her quick, light voice as Mrs. Mansfield and Charmian came into the music-room. "It's poison. It turns everything to I forget what, but something that develops the microbes instead of destroying them. I nearly died of it. Ah, Violet! Don't let Charmian be massaged by a Swede. It will ruin her figure. I've had to starve in Switzerland, or I couldn't have got into any of my new gowns. There's nothing so fatal as a rest cure. It sets every nerve on edge. The terrible monotony, and not knowing whether those one loves are alive or dead, whether the Government's gone out, or if there's a new King, or anything. Quite unnatural! It unfits one to face life and cope with one's friends. But Max would make me. Dear old Max! He's such a faddist. Men are the real faddists. I'll tell you about a marvellous new Arab remedy presently. I heard about it in Paris. We are going to have a lot of music in a minute. Yes, yes!"

She spoke rapidly, looking about the room and seldom

hearing what was said to her. Perpetual society had destroyed in her all continuity of mind. Ever since she could remember she had forgotten how to listen. She wanted to see, hear, know everybody, everything. Her mind hovered on the horizon, her restless and pale-blue eyes sought the farthest corners of the chamber to see what was happening in them, while she spoke to those within a foot or two of her. She laughed at jokes she did not catch or want to catch. She replied to questions she had divined by the expression on a face while she was glancing over the head it belonged to. She asked for information and travelled away ere it was given. Yet many people liked her. She was one of those very fair and small women who always look years younger than almost anyone really is, was full of vague charm, was kind, not stupid, and a good little thing, had two children and was only concentrated when at the dressmaker's or trying on hats.

Max was devoted to her and rejoiced in spoiling her. He was one of those men who like to have a butterfly in the room with them.

Mrs. Mansfield never tried to talk to Delia in a crowd, and she and Charmian went on into the big room. It was already full of people, many of whom were sitting on chairs grouped about the dais on which was the piano, while others stood about, and still others looked down upon the throng from recessed balconies, gained from a hidden corridor with which the main staircase of the house communicated.

Charmian saw Mrs. Shiffney not far off, talking and laughing with a great portrait painter, who looked like a burly farmer, and with a renowned operatic baritone, whose voice had left him in the prime of his life and who now gave singing lessons, and tried to fight down the genius which was in him and to which he could no longer give expression. He had a pale, large, and cruel face, and gray eyes that had become sinister since the disaster which had overtaken him. Near this group were three men, a musical critic, Paul Lane, and a famous English composer, prop and stay of provincial festivals. The composer was handsome, with merry eyes and a hearty laugh which seemed to proclaim "Sanity! Sanity! Sanity! Don't be afraid of the composer!" The critic was tall, gay, and ener-

getic, and also looked—indeed, seemed to mean to look—a thorough good fellow who had a hatred of shams. Lane, pale and discontented, had an air of being out of place in their company. Pretty women were everywhere, and there were many young and very smart men. On a sofa close to Charmian a dégagée-looking Duchess was telling a "darkie" story to a lively and debonair writer, who was finding his story to cap it while he listened and smiled. Just beyond them were two impertinent and picturesquely dressed girls, sisters, whom Charmian knew intimately and met at almost every party she went to. One of them, who wore gold laurel leaves in her dark hair, made a little face at Charmian, which seemed to express a satirical welcome and the promise of sarcasm when they should be near enough to talk. The other was being prettily absurd with an excellent match. Close to the piano stood a very beautiful woman dressed in black, without jewels or gloves, who had an exquisite profile, hollow cheeks and haggard but lovely brown eyes. She was talking to several people who were gathered about her, and never smiled. It was impossible to imagine that she could ever smile. Her name was Lady Mildred Burnington, and she was an admirable amateur violinist, married to Admiral Sir Hilary Burnington, one of the Sea Lords. Max Elliot was in the distance, talking eagerly in the midst of a group of musicians. A tall singer, a woman from the Paris Opéra Comique, stood by him with her right hand on his arm, as if she wanted to interrupt him. She was deathly pale, with hair like the night, ebon, and a face almost as exaggeratedly expressive as a tragic pierrot's. People pointed her out as Millie Deans, a Southern American never yet heard in London. She spoke to Max Elliot, then looked round the room, with sultry, defiant and yet anxious eyes.

As if in answer to Millie Deans's words, Max Elliot moved away with her, and took her through the throng to Mrs. Shiffney, who turned round with her movement of the shoulders as they came up. Charmian, watching, saw Mrs. Shiffney's gay and careless smile, the piercing light in her eyes as she looked swiftly at the singer, who faced her with a tragic and determined expression. The portrait painter stood by, with his rather protruding eyes fixed on Miss Deans.

As Charmian glanced round at the crowd and spoke to one person and another she was seized again by her horror of being one of the unknown lives. She saw many celebrities. She yearned to be numbered among them. If she could even be as Mrs. Shiffney, an arbiter of taste, a setter of fashions in admiration; if she could see people look at her, as Millie Deans looked at Mrs. Shiffney, with the hard determination to win her over to their side in the battle of art, she thought she could be happy. But to be nobody, "that pretty little Charmian," "that graceful Charmian Mansfield, but she's not half as clever as her mother"! To-night she felt as if she could not bear it.

Mrs. Shiffney had turned away from the singer, and now her eyes rested on Charmian. She nodded and smiled and made a beckoning motion with her left hand. But at this moment a singer and composer, half Spanish, half nobody knew what, who called himself Ferdinand Rades, sat down before the piano with a lighted cigarette in his mouth and struck a few soft chords, looking about him with a sort of sad and languid insolence and frowning till his thick eyebrows came down to make a penthouse roof above his jet black eyes.

"Hush—hush, please!" said Max Elliot, loudly. "'Sh—'sh—'sh! Monsieur Rades is going to sing."

He bent to Rades.

"What is it? Monsieur Rades will sing *Le Moulin*, and *Le Retour de Madame Blague*."

There was a ripple of applause, and Mrs. Shiffney hastily made her way to a chair just in front of the piano, sat down on it, and gazed at Rades, who turned and stared at her. Then, taking the cigarette from his mouth, he sang *Le Moulin* at her, leaning back, swaying and moving his thick eyebrows. It was a sad song, full of autumnal atmosphere, a delicate and sensual caress of sorrow. The handsome composer and the lusty musical critic listened to it, watched the singer with a sort of bland contempt. But when he threw away his cigarette and sang *Le Retour de Madame Blague*, an outrageous trifle, full of biting esprit and insolent wit, with a refrain like the hum of Paris by night, and a long *bouche fermée* effect at the end, even they joined in the laughter and the applause, though with a certain reluctance, as if, in doing so, they half

feared to descend into a gutter where slippery and slimy things made their abode.

Mrs. Shiffney got up and begged Ferdinand to sing again, mentioning several songs by name. He shook his head, letting his apparently boneless and square-nailed hands stray about over the piano all the time she was speaking to him.

"*Non, non! Ce soir non! Impossible!*"

"Then sing *Petite Fille de Tombouctou!*" she exclaimed at last.

And before he could answer she turned round, smiling, and said: "*Petite Fille de Tombouctou.*"

There was a murmur of delight, and the impertinent girl with laurel leaves in her dark hair suddenly looked exotic and full of languors. And Charmian thought of the yacht. Had Mrs. Shiffney received Claude Heath's answer yet? He was to make up his mind on Sunday. Rades was singing. His accompaniment was almost terribly rhythmical, with a suggestion of the little drums that the black men love. She saw fierce red flowers while he sang, strange alleys with houses like huts, trees standing stiffly in a blaze of heat, sand, limbs the color of slate. The sound of the curious voice had become Eastern, the look in the insolent black eyes Eastern. There seemed to be an odd intoxication in the face, pale, impassive, and unrighteous, as if the effects of a drug were beginning to steal upon the senses. And the white, square-nailed hands beat gently upon the piano till many people, unconsciously, began to sway ever so little to and fro. An angry look came into Millie Deans's eyes, and when the last drum throb died away and the little girl of Tombouctou slept for ever in the sand, slain by her Prince of Darkness, for a reason that seemed absurdly inadequate to the British composer who was a prop of the provincial festivals, but quite adequate to almost every woman in the room, her mouth set in a hardness that was almost menacing.

After ten minutes' conversation an English soprano sang Bach's *Heart Ever Faithful.* Variety was always welcomed at the parties in Cadogan Square.

"Glorious, old chap!" said the British composer. "We've come up into God's air now."

The critic swung his right arm like a man who enjoyed bowling practice at the nets.

"Lung exercise! Lung exercise!" he breathed. "And that drop at the end! What a stroke of genius!"

Mrs. Shiffney had disappeared with Rades. She loved Bach—in the supper-room. In the general movement which took place when the soprano had left the dais, escorted by Max Elliot, to have a glass of something, Charmian found herself beside Margot Drake, the girl with the laurel leaves.

Margot and her sister Kit were extremely well known in London. Their father was a very rich iron-master, a self-made man, who had been created a Baronet and had married an ultra-aristocratic woman, the beautiful Miss Enid Blensover, related to half the Peerage. The blend had resulted in the two girls, who were certainly anything rather than ordinary. They were half Blensovers and half Drakes: delicate, languid, hot-house plants; shrewd, almost coarse, and pushing growths, hardy and bold, and inclined to be impudent. In appearance they resembled their mother, and they had often much of her enervated and almost decaying manner. Her beauty was of the dropping-to-pieces type, bound together by wonderful clothes of a fashion peculiar to herself and very effective. But they had the energy, the ruthlessness, and the indifference to opinion of their father, and loved to startle the world he had won for himself. They were shameless, ultra-smart, with a sort of half-condescending passion for upper Bohemia. And as neither their mother nor they cared about anybody's private life or morals, provided the sinner was celebrated, lovely, or amusing, they knew intimately, even to calling by Christian names, all sorts of singers, actresses, dancers, sculptors, writers, and painters, who were never received in any sort of good society on the Continent or in America. London's notorious carelessness in such matters was led gaily by their mother and by them. Their house in Park Lane was popularly known as "the ragbag," and they were perpetually under the spell of some rage of the moment. Now they were twin Bacchantes, influenced by a Siberian dancer at the Palace; now curiously Eastern, captured by a Nautch girl whom they had come to know in Paris. For a time they were Japanese, when the

Criterion opened its doors to a passionate doll from Yokohama, who became their bosom friend. Italy touched them with the lovely hands of La Divina Carlotta, our lady of tears from a slum of Naples. The Sicilians turned them to fire and the Swedish singers to snow. At this moment Margot was inclined to be classic, caught by a plastic poseuse from Athens, who, attired solely in gold-leaf, was giving exhibitions at the Hippodrome to the despair of Mrs. Grundy. And Kit was waiting for a new lead and marking time in the newest creations from Paris.

"Charmian, come and sit down for just a moment! Run away and play, Lord Mark!"

"With whom?" said a handsome boy plaintively.

"With Jenny Smythe, with Lady Dolly, anyone who can play pretty. Come back in ten minutes and I'll be bothered with you again—perhaps. Let's sit here, Charmian. Wasn't the *Fille* too perfect? But the Bach was like the hewing of wood and the drawing of water. Max shouldn't have allowed it. What do you think of my gold gown?"

"It's lovely!"

"The Greeks knew everything and we know nothing. This dress hangs in such a calm way that one can't be anything but classic in it. Since I've known the Persephone I've learnt how to live. You must go to the Hippodrome. But what's all this about your going yachting with the Adelaide and an extraordinary Cornish genius? What's the matter?"

The last words came out in a suddenly business-like and almost self-made voice, and Margot's deep eyes, full hitherto of a conscious calm, supposed to be Greek, abruptly darted questioning fires which might have sprung from a modern hussy.

"D'you like him so much?" continued Margot, before Charmian had time to answer.

"You're making a great mistake," said Charmian, with airy dignity. "I was only surprised to hear that Claude Heath was coming. I didn't know it. I understood he had refused to come. He always refuses everything. How did you hear of him?"

"The Adelaide has been talking about him. She says he's a genius who hates the evil world, and will only know her and your mother, and that he's going with her and you and Max Elliot to the Greek Isles on one condition—that nobody else is to be asked and that he is to be introduced to no one. If it's really the Greek Isles, I think I ought to be taken. I told the Adelaide so, but she said Claude Heath would rather die than have a girl like me with him on the yacht."

"So he really has accepted?"

"Evidently. Now you don't look pleased."

"Mr. Heath's Madretta's friend, not mine," said Charmian.

"Really? Then your mother should go to Greece. Why did the Adelaide ask you?"

"I can't imagine."

"Now, Charmian!"

"I assure you, Margot, I was amazed at being asked."

"But you accepted."

"I wanted to get out of this weather."

"With a Cornish genius?"

"Mr. Heath only looks at middle-aged married women," said Charmian. "I think he has a horror of girls. He and I don't get on at all."

"What is he like?"

"Plain and gaunt."

"Is his music really so wonderful?"

"I've never heard a note of it."

"Hasn't your mother?"

With difficulty Charmian kept a displeased look out of her face as she answered sweetly:

"Once, I think. But she has said very little about it."

At this moment the tragic mask of Miss Deans was seen in a doorway, and Margot got up quickly.

"There's that darling Millie from Paris!"

"Who? Where?"

"Millie Deans, the only real actress on the operatic stage. Until you've seen her in *Crêpe de Chine* you've never seen opera as it ought to be. Millie! Millie!"

She went rather aggressively toward Miss Deans, forgetting her calm gown for the moment.

So Claude Heath had accepted. Charmian concluded this from Margot Drake's remarks. No doubt Mrs. Shiffney had received his answer that day. She loved giving people the impression that she was adventurous and knew strange and wonderful beings who wouldn't know anyone else. So she had not been able to keep silence about Claude Heath and the Greek Isles. Charmian's heart bounded. The peculiar singing of Ferdinand Rades, which had upon hearers much of the effect made upon readers by the books of Pierre Loti, had excited and quickened her imagination. Secretly Charmian was romantic, though she seldom seemed so. She longed after wonders, and was dissatisfied with the usual. Yet she was capable of expecting wonders to conform to a standard to which she was accustomed. There was much conventionality in her, though she did not know it. "The Brighton tradition" was not a mere phrase in her mother's mouth. Laughingly said it contained, nevertheless, particles of truth. But at this moment it seemed far away from Charmian, quite foreign to her. The Greek Isles and—

Millie Deans had stepped upon the dais, accompanied by a very thin, hectic French boy, who sat down at the piano. But she did not seem inclined to sing. She looked round, glanced at the hectic boy, folded her hands in front of her, and waited. Max Elliot approached with his genial air and spoke to her. She answered, putting her dead-white face close to his. He also looked round the room, then hurried out. There was a pause.

"What is it?" people murmured, turning their heads.

Paul Lane bent down and said to the dégagée Duchess:

"She won't sing till Mr. Brett, of the opera, comes."

His lips curled in a sarcastic smile.

"What a fuss they all make about themselves!" returned the Duchess. "It's a hard face."

"Millie's? She's in a violent temper. You'll see; until Mr. Brett comes she won't open her mouth."

Miss Deans stood rigid, with her hands always crossed in front of her and her eyes watching the door. The boy at the piano moved his hands over the keys without producing any sound. There was the ripple of a laugh, and Mrs. Shiffney

came carelessly in with Rades, followed by a small, stout man, Mr. Brett, and Max Elliot. When he saw Miss Deans the stout man looked humorously sarcastic. Max Elliot wanted Mrs. Shiffney to come near to the dais, but she refused, and sat down by the door. Rades whispered to her and she laughed again. Max Elliot went close to Millie Deans. She frowned at her accompanist, who began to play, looking sensitive. Mr. Brett leaned against the wall looking critical.

Charmian was in one of the balconies now with a young man. She saw her mother opposite to her with Sir Hilary Burnington, looking down on the singer and the crowd, and she thought her mother must have heard something very sad. Millie Deans sang an aria of Mozart in a fine, steady, and warm soprano voice. Then she sang two *morceaux* from the filmy opera, *Crêpe de Chine*, by a young Frenchman, which she had helped to make the rage of Paris. Her eyes were often on Mr. Brett, commanding him to be favorable, yet pleading with him too.

As Mrs. Mansfield looked down she was feeling sad. The crowded room beneath her was a small epitome of the world to which talent and genius are flung, to be kissed or torn to pieces, perhaps to be kissed then torn to pieces. And too often the listeners felt that they were superior to those they listened to, because to them an appeal was made, because they were in the position of judges. "Do we like her? Shall we take her?" Many faces expressed such questions as this strange-looking woman sang. "What does Mr. Brett think of her?" and eyes turned toward the stout man leaning against the wall.

Did not Claude Heath do well to keep out of it all?

The question passed through Mrs. Mansfield's mind as she felt the humiliation of the yoke which the world fastens on the artist's neck. She had come to care for Heath almost a little jealously, but quite unselfishly. She was able to care unselfishly, because she had given all of herself that was passionate long ago to the man who was dead. Never again could she be in love. Never again could she desire the closest relation woman can be in with man. But she felt protective toward Heath. She had the strong instinct, to shelter his young aus-

terity, his curious talent, his reserve, and his sensitiveness. And she was thinking now, "If he goes yachting with Adelaide! If he allows Max to exploit him! If he becomes known, perhaps the fashion, even the rage! And if they get sick of him?" Yet what is talent for? Why is it given to any man? Surely to be used, displayed, bestowed.

There was a hard and cruel expression on many of the listening faces below. Singers were there, appraising; professional critics coldly judging, jaded, sated, because they had heard too much of the wonderful sounds of the world; men like Paul Lane, by temperament inclined to sneer and condemn; women who loved to be in camps and whose idea of setting an artist on high was to tear all other artists down. Battlefields! Battlefields! Mrs. Mansfield was painfully conscious that the last thing to be found in any circle of life is peace. Too often there was poison in the cup which the artist had to drink. Too often to attract the gaze of the world was to attract and concentrate many of the floating hatreds of the world. The little old house near Petersburg Place was a quiet refuge. Mrs. Searle, a kindly dragon, kept the door. Yellow-haired Fan was the fairy within. The faded curtains of orange color shut out very much that was black and horrid. And there the Kings of the East passed by. But there, also, the sea was as the blood of a dead man.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Sir Hilary was speaking.

He had a face like a fairly good-natured bulldog, and, like the bulldog, looked as if, once fastened on an enemy, he would not easily be detached.

"I think it's a very beautiful voice and remarkably trained."

"Do you? Well, now I don't think she's a patch on Dantini."

The Admiral was wholly unmusical, but, having married an accomplished violinist, he was inclined to lay down the law about music.

"Don't you?"

"No, I don't. No lightness, no agility; too heavy."

"There are holes in her voice," observed a stout musical

critic standing beside him. "The middle register is all wrong."

"That's it," said the Admiral, snapping his jaws. "Holes in the voice and the—the what you may call it all wrong."

"I wonder what Adelaide Shiffney thinks?" said a small, dark, and shrewish-looking woman just behind them. "I must go and find out."

"My wife won't have her. I'm dead certain of that," said the Admiral.

"She ought to start again with De Reszke," said the musical critic, puffing out his fat cheeks and looking suddenly like a fish.

"Well, I must go down. It's getting late," said Mrs. Mansfield.

"It isn't a real soprano," said someone in a husky voice. "It's a forced-up mezzo."

Beneath them Millie Deans was standing by Mrs. Shiffney, who was saying:

"Charming! No, I haven't heard *Crêpe de Chine.* I don't care much for Fournier's music. He imitates the Russians. Such a pity! Are you really going back to-morrow? Goodbye, then! Now, Rades, be amiable! Give us *Enigme.*" Mr. Brett had disappeared.

"No, Mr. Elliot, it's no use talking to me, not a bit of use!" Millie Deans exclaimed vehemently in the hall as Rades began *Enigme* in his most velvety voice. "London has no taste, it has only fashions. In Paris that man is not a singer at all. He is merely a *diseur.* No one would dream of putting him in a programme with me."

"But, my dear Miss Deans, you knew he was singing to-night. And my programmes are always eclectic. There is no intention—"

"I don't know anything about eplectic," said Millie Deans, whose education was one-sided, but who had temperament and talent, and also a very strong temper. "But I do know that Mr. Brett, who seems to rule you all here, is as ignorant of music as—as a carp, isn't it? Isn't it, I say!"

"I daresay it is. But, my dear Miss Deans, people were delighted. You will come back, you—"

"Never! He means to keep me out. I can see it. He has that Dantini in his pocket. A woman with a voice like a dwarf in a gramophone!"

At this moment, perhaps fortunately, Miss Deans's hired electric brougham came up, and Max Elliot got rid of her.

Although she had lost her temper Miss Deans had not lost her shrewdness. Mr. Brett shrugged his shoulders and confessed that the talent of Miss Deans did not appeal to him.

"Her singing bored me," was the verdict of Mrs. Shiffney.

And many of Max Elliot's guests found that they had been subject to a similar ennui when the American was singing.

"Poor woman!" thought Mrs. Mansfield, who was unprejudiced, and who, with Max Elliot and other genuine musicians, recognized the gifts of Miss Deans.

And again her mind went to Claude Heath.

"Better to keep out of it! Better to keep out of it!" a voice said within her.

And apparently Heath was of one mind with her on this matter.

As Mrs. Mansfield and Charmian were going away they met Mrs. Shiffney in the hall with Ferdinand, who was holding her cloak.

"Oh, Charmian!" she said, turning quickly, with the cloak over one of her broad shoulders. "I heard from Claude Heath to-day."

"Did you?" said Charmian languidly, looking about her at the crowd.

"Yes. He can't come. His mother's got a cold and he doesn't like to leave her, or something. And he's working very hard on a composition that nobody is ever to hear. And —I forget what else. But there were four sides of excuses."

She laughed.

"Poor boy! He hasn't much savoir-faire. Good-night! I'll let you know when we start."

Her eyes pierced Charmian.

"Come, Ferdinand! No, you get in first. I hate being passed and trodden on when once I'm in, and I take up so much room."

That night, when Charmian was safely in her bedroom and

had locked the door against imaginary intruders, she cried, bitterly, impetuously:

"If only Rades had not sung *Petite Fille de Tombouctou!*"

That song seemed to have put the finishing touch to desires which would never be gratified. Charmian could not have explained why. But such music was cruel when life went wrong.

"Why won't he come? Why won't he come?" she murmured angrily.

Then she looked at herself in the glass, and thought she realized that from the first she had hated Claude Heath.

CHAPTER VIII

A FORTNIGHT later *The Wanderer* lay at anchor in the harbor of Algiers. But only the captain and some of the crew were on board. Mrs. Shiffney, Max Elliot, and Paul Lane had gone off in a motor to Bou-Saada. Alfred Waring, the extra man who had come instead of Claude Heath, had run over to Biskra to see some old friends, and Charmian and Susan Fleet were at the Hôtel St. George at Mustapha Supérieur.

Charmian was not very well. The passage from Marseilles had been rough, and she had suffered. As she had never before seen Algiers she had got out of the expedition to Bou Saada. And Susan Fleet had, apparently, volunteered to stay with her, but had really stayed, as she did a great many things when she was with Mrs. Shiffney, because there was no one else to do it and Mrs. Shiffney had told her so.

Nevertheless, though she wanted to see Bou-Saada, she was reconciled to her lot. She liked Charmian very well, though she knew her very little. And she had the great advantage in life—so, at least, she considered it—of being a theosophist.

Mrs. Shiffney had not known how to put Charmian off. After hearing again *Petite Fille de Tombouctou* she had felt she must get out of Europe, if only for five minutes. So she had made the best of things. And Charmian would rather have died than have given up going after Claude Heath's refusal to go. A run over to Algiers was nothing. They could be back in England in two or three weeks. So *The Wanderer* had gone round to Marseilles, and the party of six had come out by train to meet her there.

Susan Fleet was one of those capable and intelligent women who are apt to develop sturdiness if they do not marry and have children. Susan had not married, and at the age of

forty-nine and nine months she was sturdy. She wore coats and skirts whenever they could be worn, and some people professed to believe that she slept in them. Her one extravagance was the wearing of white gloves which fitted her hands perfectly. Her collars were immaculate, and she always looked almost startlingly neat. All her dresses were "off the ground." In appearance she was plain, but she was not ugly. She had a fairly good nose and mouth, but they were never admired, thick brown hair which no one ever noticed, and a passable complexion. Her eyes were her worst feature. They looked as if they were loose in her head and might easily drop out, and they were rather glazed than luminous, and were indefinite in color. But they were eyes which reassured doubtful people, eyes which could be, and were, trusted "on sight," eyes which had seen a good deal but which could never take nastiness into the soul to its harming. Her father was dead, and she had a mother who, at the age of sixty-seven—she had really been married at sixteen—was living as companion at Folkestone with an old lady of eighty-two.

Susan Fleet was one of those absolutely unsycophantic and naturally well-bred persons who are often liked by those "at the top of the tree," and who sometimes, without beauty, great talent, money, or other wordly advantages, and without any thought of striving, achieve "positions" which everybody recognizes. Susan had a "position." She knew and was liked by all sorts and conditions of important people, had been about, had stayed in houses with Royalties, and had always remained just herself, perfectly natural, quite unpretending, and wholly free from every grain of nonsense. "There's no nonsense about Susan Fleet!" many said approvingly, especially those who themselves were full of it. She possessed one shining advantage, a constitutional inability to be a snob, and she was completely ignorant of possessing it. Mrs. Shiffney and various other very rich women could not do without Susan. Unlike her mother, she had no permanent post. But she was always being "wanted," and was well paid, not always in money only, for the excellent services she was able to render. She never made any secret of her poverty, though she never put it forward, and it was understood by everyone that she had

to earn her own living. Many years ago she had qualified to do this by mastering various homely accomplishments. She was a competent accountant, an excellent typewriter, a lucid writer of letters, knew how to manage servants, and was a mistress or the art of travelling. When looking out trains she never made a mistake. She was never sea or train sick, never lost her temper or her own or other people's luggage, had a perfect sense of time without being aggressively punctual, and seemed totally unaffected by changes of climate. And she knew nothing about the meaning of the word shyness.

When the big motor had gone off with its trio to desert places Charmian suddenly realized the unexpectedness of her situation—alone above Algiers with a woman who was almost a stranger. This scarcely seemed like yachting. They had come up to the hotel because Mrs. Shiffney always stayed at an hotel, if there was a good one, when the yacht was in harbor, "to make a change." It was full of English and Americans, but they knew nobody, and, having two sitting-rooms, had no reason to seek public rooms where acquaintances are made. Charmian wondered how long Mrs. Shiffney would stay at Bou Saada.

"Back to-morrow!" she had said airily as she waved her hand. The assertion meant next week if only she were sufficiently amused.

Charmian had been really stricken on the stormy voyage, and still had a sensation of oppression in the head, of vagueness, of smallness, and of general degradation. She felt also terribly depressed, like one under sentence not of death, but of something very disagreeable. And when Susan Fleet said to her in a chest voice, "Do you want to do anything this afternoon?" she answered:

"I'll keep quiet to-day. I'll sit in the garden. But, please, don't bother about me."

"I'll come and sit in the garden, too," said Miss Fleet in a calm and business-like manner.

Charmian thought she was going to add, "And bring my work with me." But she did not.

On the first terrace there were several people in long chairs looking lazy; women with picture papers, men smoking, old

buffers talking about politics and Arabs. Charmian glanced at them and instinctively went on, descending toward a quieter part of the prettily and cleverly arranged garden. The weather was beautiful, warm, but not sultry. Already she was conscious of a feeling of greater ease.

"Shall we sit here?" she said, pointing to two chairs under some palm trees by a little table.

"Yes. Why not?" returned Susan Fleet.

They sat down.

"Do you feel better?" asked Susan.

"I shall."

"It must be dreadful being ill at sea. I never am."

"And you have travelled a great deal, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have. I often go with Adelaide. Once we went to India."

"Was it there you became a Theosophist?"

"That had something to do with it, I suppose. When we were at Benares Adelaide thought she would like to live there. The day after she thought so she found we must go away."

Miss Fleet carefully peeled off her white gloves and leaned back. Her odd eyes seemed to drop in their sockets, as if they were trying to tumble out.

"Isn't it—" Charmian began, and stopped abruptly.

"Yes?"

"I don't know what I was going to say."

"Perhaps a great bore not to be one's own mistress?" suggested Miss Fleet, composedly.

"Something of that sort perhaps."

"Oh, no! I'm accustomed to it. Freedom is a phrase. I'm quite as free as Adelaide. It's usually a great mistake to pity servants."

"And oneself? I suppose you would say it was a great mistake to pity oneself?"

"I never do it," replied Miss Fleet.

She had charming hands. One of them lay on the little table with a beam of the sun on it.

"Perhaps you haven't great desires? Perhaps you don't want many things?"

"I suppose I've been like most women in that respect. But I shall be fifty almost directly."

"How frightful!" was Charmian's mental comment.

"No, it isn't."

"Isn't what?" said Charmian, startled.

"It isn't at all awful to be fifty, or any other age, if you accept it quietly as inevitable. But everything one kicks against hurts one, of course. I expect to pass a very pleasant day on my fiftieth birthday."

Charmian put her chin in her hand.

"How did you know what I thought?"

"A girl of your age would be almost certain to think something of that kind."

"Yes, I suppose so."

Charmian sighed, and then suddenly felt rather angry, and lifted her chin.

"But surely I need not be exactly like every other girl of twenty-one!" she exclaimed, with much more vivacity.

"You aren't. No girl is. But you all think it must be dreadful to be a moneyless spinster of fifty. I believe, for my part, that there's many a *vieille fille* who is not particularly sorry for herself or for the man who didn't want to marry her."

Miss Fleet was smiling.

"But I'm not a pessimist as regards marriage," she added. "And I think men are quite as good as women, and quite as bad."

"How calm you are!"

"Why not?"

"I could never be like that."

"Perhaps when you are fifty."

"Not if I'm unmarried!" said Charmian, with a bluntness, a lack of caution very rare in her.

"I don't think you will be, unless you go on before you are fifty."

Charmian gazed at Miss Fleet, and was conscious that she herself was entirely concentrated on the present life; she was a good girl, she had principles, even sometimes desires not free from nobility. She believed in a religion—the Protestant

religion it happened to be. And yet—yes, certainly—she was absolutely concentrated on the present life. She even felt as if it were somehow physically impossible for her to be anything else. To "go on" before she was fifty! What a horror in that idea! To "go on" at all, ever—how strange, how dreadful! She was silent for some minutes, with her pretty head against the back of a chair.

An Arab dragoman went by among the trees. The strangled yelp of a motor-car rose out of a cloud of white dust at the bottom of the garden. The faint cry of a siren came up from the distant sea where *The Wanderer* lay at rest. And suddenly Charmian thought, "When am I going to be here again?"

"Do you ever feel you have lived before in some place when you visit it for the first time?" she said, moving her head from the back of her chair.

"I did once."

"Do you ever feel you will live in a place that's new to you, that you have no connection with, and that you have only come to for a day or two?"

"I can't say I do."

"I suppose we all have lots of absurd fancies."

"I don't think I do," responded Miss Fleet, quite without arrogance.

"I—I wish you'd tell me where you got that coat and skirt," said Charmian.

"I will. I got it at Folkestone. I'll give you the address when we go on board again. My mother lives at Folkestone. She is a companion to a dear old Mrs. Simpkins, so I go down there whenever I have time."

One's mother companion to a dear old Mrs. Simpkins! How extraordinary! And why did it make Charmian feel as if she were almost fond of Susan Fleet?

"And I get really well-cut things for a very small price there, so I'm lucky."

"I think you are lucky in another way," hazarded Charmian.

"Yes?"

"To be as you are."

After that day in the garden Charmian knew that she was

going to be fond of Susan Fleet. Mrs. Shiffney, of course, did not return on the following afternoon.

"I daresay she'll be away for a week," Susan said. "If you feel better we might go and see the town and visit some of the villas. There are several that are beautiful."

Quite eagerly Charmian acquiesced. But she soon had reason to be sorry that she had done so. For much that she saw increased her misery. Boldly now she applied that word to her condition, moved perhaps to be at last frank with herself by the frankness of her quite unintrusive companion. Algiers affected her somewhat as the *Petite Fille de Tombouctou* had affected her, but much more powerfully. This was exactly how she put it to herself: it made her feel that she was violently in love with Claude Heath. What a lie that had been before the mirror after Max Elliot's party. How dreadful it was to walk in these exquisite and tropical gardens, to stand upon these terraces, to wander over these marble pavements and beneath these tiled colonnades, to hear these fountains singing under orange trees, to see these far stretches of turquoise and deep blue water, to watch Arabs on white roads passing noiselessly by night under a Heaven thick with stars, and to know "He is not here and I am nothing to him!"

Charmian's romantic tendency, her sense of, and desire for, wonder were violently stirred by the new surroundings. She was painfully affected. She began to feel almost desperate. That terrible sensation, known perhaps in its frightening nightmare fulness only to youth, "My life is done, all real life is at an end for me, because I cannot be linked with my other half, because I have found it, but it has not found me!" besieged, assailed her. It shook her, as neurasthenia shakes its victim, squeezing as if with fierce and powerful hands till the blood seems to be driven out of the arteries. It changed the world for her, making of beauty a phenomenon to terrify. She looked at loveliness, and it sent a lacerating ache all through her, because only the half looked at it and not the whole, some hideous astral shape, not the joyous, powerful body meant for the life of this splendid world, at home in the atmosphere specially created for it. She began to be frightened and to think, "But what can I do? How will it end?" She longed

to do something active, to make an exertion, and struggle out of all this assailing strangeness. Like one attacked in a tunnel by claustrophobia, she had an impulse to dash open doors and windows, to burst arching, solid walls, and to be elsewhere.

At first she carefully concealed her condition from Susan Fleet, but when three days had gone by, and no word came from Mrs. Shiffney, she began to feel that fate had left her alone with the one human being of whom she could make a confidante. Again and again she looked furtively at Miss Fleet's serene and practical face, and wondered what effect her revelation would have upon the very sensible personality it indicated. "She'll think it is all nonsense, that it doesn't matter at all!" thought Charmian. And more than ever she wanted to tell Miss Fleet. In self-restraint she became violently excited. Often she felt on the verge of tears. And at last, very suddenly and without premeditation, she spoke.

They were visiting "Djenan el Ali," the lovely villa of an acquaintance of Mrs. Shiffney's who was away in Europe. Miss Fleet had been there before and knew the servants, who gladly gave her permission to show Charmian everything. After wandering through the house, which was a pure gem of Arab architecture, five hundred years old, and in excellent preservation, they descended into the garden, which was on the slope of the hill over which the houses of Mustapha Supérieur are scattered. Here no sounds of voices reached them, no tram bells, no shrieks from motors buzzing along the white road high above them. The garden was large and laid out with subtle ingenuity. The house was hidden away from the world that was so near.

Miss Fleet strolled on, descending by winding paths, closely followed by Charmian, till she came to a sheet of artificial water, whose uneven banks were covered with masses of azaleas, rhododendrons, bamboos, and flowering shrubs. In the midst of this lake there was a tiny island, just big enough to give room for the growth of one gigantic date palm, and for a mass of arum lilies from which it rose towering toward the delicate blue of the cloudless sky. The lilies and the palm—they were the island, round which slept greenish-yellow

water guarded by the azaleas, the rhododendrons, the bamboos, and the shrubs. And on the path where Charmian and Miss Fleet stood there was a long pergola of roses, making a half-moon.

Charmian stood still and looked. The ground formed a sort of basin sheltering the little lake. Even the white Arab house was hidden from it by a screen of trees. The island, a wonderfully clever thing, attained by artificiality a sort of strange exoticism which almost intoxicated Charmian. Perhaps nothing wholly natural could have affected her in quite the same way. There was something of the art of a Ferdinand Rades in the art which had created that island, had set it just where it was. It had been planned to communicate a thrill to highly civilized people, to suggest to them—what? the Fortunate Isles, perhaps, the strange isles, which they dream of when they have a moment to dream, but which they will certainly never see. It was a suggestive little isle. One longed to sail away, to land on it—and then?

Charmian stood as if hypnotized by it. Her eyes went from the lilies up the great wrinkled trunk of the palm to its far away tufted head, then travelled down to the big white flowers. She sighed and gazed. And just at that moment she felt that she was going to tell Susan Fleet immediately.

On the shore of the lake there was a seat.

"I must tell you something," Charmian said, sinking down on it. "I'm very unhappy."

She looked again at the island and the tears came to her eyes.

"He never has even let me hear a note of his music!" she thought, connecting Claude Heath's talent with the lilies and the palm in some strange way that seemed inevitable.

Susan Fleet sat down and folded her white-gloved hands in her neat tailor-made lap.

"I'm sorry for that," she said.

"And seeing that island, seeing all these lovely places and things makes it so much worse. I didn't know—till I came here. At least, I didn't really know I knew. Oh, Miss Fleet, how happy I could be here if I wasn't so dreadfully wretched."

A sort of wave of desperation—it seemed a hot wave—

surged through Charmian. All the strangeness of Claude Heath flowed upon her and receded from her, leaving her in a sort of dreadful acrid dryness.

"Surely," she said, "when you are in places like this you must feel that nothing is of any real use if one has it alone."

"But I'm with you now," returned Miss Fleet, evidently wishing to give Charmian a chance to regain her reserve.

"With me! What's the use of that? You must know what I mean."

"I suppose you mean a man."

Charmian blushed.

"That sounds—oh, well, how can we help it? It is not our fault. We have to be so, even if we hate it. And I do hate it. I don't want to care about him. I never have. He's not in my set. He doesn't know anyone I know, or do anything I do, or care for almost anything I care for—perhaps. But I feel I could do such things for him, that he will never do for himself. And I want to do them. I must do them, but he will never let me."

"I hope he's a gentleman. I don't believe in mixing classes, simply because it seems to me that one class never really understands another, not at all because one class isn't just as good as another."

"Of course he's a gentleman. Mrs. Shiffney asked him to come on the yacht."

"Oh! Mr. Heath!" observed Miss Fleet.

Charmian thought she detected a slight change in the deep chest tone of her companion's voice.

"D'you know him?" she asked, almost sharply.

"No."

"Have you seen him?"

"No, never. I only heard that he might be coming from Adelaide, and then that he wasn't coming."

"He knew I was coming and he refused to come. Isn't it degrading?"

"Is he a great friend of yours?"

"No, but he is of my mother's. What must you think of me? What do you think of me?"

Charmian put her hand impulsively on Miss Fleet's arm.

"I didn't know till I came here. I thought I disliked him, I almost thought I hated him."

"That's always a bad sign, I believe," said Miss Fleet.

"Yes, I know. But he doesn't hate me. He doesn't think about me. He's mother's friend and not even my enemy. Do tell me, Miss Fleet—or may I call you Susan to-day?"

"Of course, and to-morrow, too."

"Thank you. You've seen lots of people. Do you think I have personality? Do you think I—am I just like everyone else? That's such a hideous idea! Have I anything that stamps me? Am I a little different from all the other girls—you know, in our sort of set? Do tell me!"

There was something humble in her quivering eagerness that quite touched Susan Fleet.

"No, I don't think you're just like everyone else."

"You aren't. And he isn't. He's not in the least like any other man I ever saw. That's the dreadful part of it. I can't imagine why I care for him, and that's why I know I shall never care for anyone else."

"Perhaps he likes you."

"No, no! No, I'm sure he doesn't. He thinks, like everyone else, that I have nothing particular in me. But it isn't true. Susan, sometimes we know a thing by instinct—don't we?"

"Certainly. Instinct is often the experience of the past working within us."

"Well, I know that I am the woman who could make Claude Heath famous, who could do for him what he could never do for himself. He has genius, I believe. Max Elliot says so. And I feel it when I'm with him. But he has no capacity for using it, as it ought to be used, to dominate the world. He's never been in the world. He knows, and wishes to know, nothing of it. That's absurd, isn't it? We ought to give, if we have anything extraordinary to give. Oh, if you knew how I've longed and pined to be extraordinary!"

"Extraordinary? In what way?"

"In gifts, in talent! I've suffered dreadfully because I simply can't endure just to be one of the silly, dull crowd. But lately—quite lately—I've begun to realize what I could

be, do. I could be the perfect wife to a great man. Don't laugh at me!"

"I'm not laughing."

"Aren't you? You are a dear! I knew you would understand. You see I've always been among people who matter. I've always known clever men who've made their names. I've always breathed in the atmosphere of culture. I'm at home in the world. I know how to take people. I have social capacities. Now he's quite different. The fact is, I have all he hasn't. And he has what I haven't, his talent. He's remarkable. Anyone would feel it in an instant. I believe he's a great man *manqué* because of a sort of kink in his temperament. And—I know that I could get rid of that kink *if*—"

She stopped. The tears rushed into her eyes. "Oh, isn't it awful to be madly in love with a man who doesn't care for you?" she exclaimed, almost fiercely.

"I'm not," returned Susan Fleet, quietly. "But I daresay it is."

"When I look at that island—"

Charmian stopped and took out her handkerchief. After using it she said, in a way that made Susan think of a fierce little cat spitting:

"But I will bring out what is in me! I will not let all my capacities go to rust."

Quite abruptly, she could not tell why, Charmian felt that there was a dawning of hope in her sky. Her depression seemed to lift a little. She was conscious of her youth, of her grace and charm, her prettiness, her intelligence. She was able to put a little trust in them.

"Susan," she said, clasping her companion's left hand, "the other day, when we were in the garden of the hotel, such a strange feeling came to me. I couldn't trust it then. I thought it must be nonsense. But it has come to me again. It seems somehow to be connected with all sorts of things—here."

"Tell me what it is."

"Yes, I must. The other day it came when I saw the dragoman, Mustapha Ali, walking toward the hotel—when he was just under that arch of pink roses. The horn of a motor

sounded in the road, and the white dust flew up in a cloud. Then I heard, far away, the siren of a ship. It was all an impression of Algiers. It was Algiers. And I felt—I shall be here again with *him*."

She gazed at Susan. Romance was alight in her long eyes.

"And now, when I look at that island, the feeling comes again. It seems to come to me out of the palm trunk and the lilies, almost as if they knew, and told me."

Susan Fleet looked at Charmian with a new interest.

"It may be so," she said. "Perhaps part of your destiny is to learn through that man, and to teach him."

"Oh, Susan! If it should be!"

Life suddenly seemed glittering with wonder to Charmian, quivering with possibility.

"But you must learn to love, if you are to do any real good."

"Learn! Why, I've just told you—"

"No, no. You don't quite understand me. Our personal loves must be expanded. They must become universal. We must overflow with love."

Charmian stared. This very quiet, very neat, and very practical woman had astonished her.

"Do you?" she almost blurted out.

"It's very, very difficult. But I wish to and try to. Do you know, I think perhaps that is why you have told me all this."

"Perhaps it is," said Charmian. "I could never have told it to anyone else."

CHAPTER IX

JUST before Charmian left England Mrs. Mansfield had begun to suspect her secret. Already from time to time she had wondered whether Charmian refused to accept Claude Heath, as she had accepted all the other habitués of the house, because she really liked him much better than she liked them. She had wondered and she had said, "No, it is not so." Had she not been less than frank with herself, and for an under reason which made her reluctant to see truth? She scarcely knew. But when Charmian was gone and her mother was quite alone, she felt almost sure that she had to face a fact very unpleasant to her. There had been something in the girl's eyes as she said good-bye, a slight hardness, a lurking defiance, something about her lips, something even in the sound of her voice which had troubled Mrs. Mansfield, which continued to trouble her while Charmian was away.

Charmian in love with Claude Heath!

It seemed to the mother in those first moments of contemplation that, if she were right in her surmise, Charmian could scarcely have set her affections on a man less suited to enter into her life, less likely to make her happy.

Charmian belonged to a certain world not merely because she was born in it, and had always lived in it, but by temperament, by character. Essentially she was of it. She could surely never be happy in the life led by Claude Heath. Could Claude Heath be happy in the sort of life led by her?

Abruptly Mrs. Mansfield felt as if she did not really know Heath very well. A great many things about him she knew. But how much of him was beyond her ken. She was not even sure how he regarded Charmian. Now she wished very much to be more clear about that.

Among her many friends Heath stood apart, and for this reason: all the other men of talent whom she knew intimately were in the same set, or belonged to sets which overlapped and

intermingled. They were men who were making, or had made, their names; men who knew, and were known by, her friends and acquaintances, who needed no explanation, who were thoroughly "in it." Only Heath was outside, was unknown, was not taking an active part in the battle of art or of life. And this fact gave him a certain strangeness, not free from romance, gave him a peculiar value in Mrs. Mansfield's eyes. She secretly cherished the thought of his individuality. She could not wish it changed. But she knew very well that though such an individuality might attract her child, indeed, she feared, had attracted Charmian, yet Charmian, if she had any influence over it, would not be satisfied to let it alone, to leave it quietly to its own natural development. Charmian would never let any plant that belonged to her grow in darkness. She understood well enough the many clever men who frequented the house, men with ambitions which they were gratifying, men who were known, or who wished and intended to be known, men, as a rule, who were fighting, or who had fought, hard battles. To several of these men Charmian could have made an excellent wife.

But if she had set her affections on Heath she had made a sad mistake. His peculiarity of temperament was in accord surely with nothing in Charmian. That very fact, perhaps, had grasped her attention, had excited her curiosity, even stirred sentiment within her. Having perceived a gulf she had longed to bridge it, to set her feet on the farther side. Mrs. Mansfield was glad that Charmian was away. Hitherto she had cultivated the friendship with Heath without arrière pensée. Now she was more conscious in it. Her great love of her only child made her wish to study Heath.

The more she studied him the more she hoped that her guess about Charmian had been wrong, and yet the more she studied him the better she liked him. There was an intensity in him that captivated her intense mind, an unworldliness that her soul approved. His lack of social ambition, of all desire to be rich and prosperous, refreshed her. She compared him secretly with other men of great talent. Some of them were not greedy for money, but even they were greedy for fame, were almost fearfully solicitous about their "position," if not their social

position then their position in the artistic world. Jealousies accompanied them, and within them were jealousies. They had not only the desire to build, but also the desire to pull down, to obliterate, to make ruins and dust.

Among all the men whom she knew, Claude Heath was the only one who was alone with his art, and who wished to remain alone with the thing he loved. There was a purity in the situation which delighted Mrs. Mansfield. Yet she realized that Heath was a man who might be won away from that which was best in him, from that which he almost sternly clung to and cherished. And one day he made her aware that he knew this.

They went to a concert together at Queen's Hall, and sat in the gallery, in seats which Heath habitually frequented when the music given was orchestral, when he wished to see as little as possible and to hear perfectly. He enjoyed hearing a fine orchestra without watching the conductor, whose necessary gestures, sometimes not free from an element of the grotesque, hindered the sweet toil of his imagination, held him back from worlds he desired to enter.

Between the two parts of the not long concert there was a pause. During it Mrs. Mansfield and Claude left their seats and strolled about in the corridor, talking. They were both of them heated by music and ready for mental intimacy. But they did not discuss the works they had just heard. Combinations of melody and harmony turned them toward life and humanity. The voices of the great orchestral family called them toward the dim avenues where in the shadows destiny wanders. Some music enlarges the borders, sets us free in regions whose confines we cannot perceive. They spoke of aims, of ideals, of goals which are very far off.

"Fine music gives me the conception of great distances," Mrs. Mansfield said presently. "It makes me feel that the soul is born for travel."

Heath stood still.

"The winding white road over the hills that loses itself in the vagueness which, in a picture, only some shade of blue can suggest. The road! The road!"

He stood leaning against the wall. As she stood by him

Mrs. Mansfield felt strangely, almost cruelly, young. It was as if student days had come for them both. She could hardly believe that her hair was snow-white, and that Charmian had been going to parties for nearly four years.

"The worst of it is," Claude continued, "that it is so hard sometimes not to wander from it."

"It seems to me you never wander."

"Because I know that, if I did, I should probably never come back to the road. What you perhaps consider my strength takes its rise, I believe, in my knowledge of my weakness. Things that are right for others aren't right for me."

No one was near them. The music seemed to have abolished for the moment the difference in age between them. Claude spoke to her as he had seldom spoken to her before, with an almost complete unreserve of manner.

"Do you know why some men enter the cloister?" he continued. "It's because they feel that if they are not monks they will be libertines. Mullion House is my cloister. I haven't got the power of apportioning my life with sweet reason, so much work, so much play, so much retirement, so much society, so much restraint, so much license. I could never pursue my art through wildness, as so many men have done, women too. I don't believe I could even stick to it in the midst of the ordinary life of pleasures and distractions. It's like a bone that I have to seize and take away into a cave where no one can see me gnaw it. Isn't that a beastly simile?"

"Is that why you won't go to Max Elliot's, that you refused Mrs. Shiffney? Do you think that the sort of thing which inspires many men—the audience, let us say, watching the combat—would unnerve you?"

"I don't say that. But I think it might lead me into wild extravagance, or into complete idleness. And I think, I know, that I might be tempted irresistibly to give an audience what it wanted. There's something in me which is ready to rush out to satisfy expectation. I hate it, but it's there."

"And yet you're so uncompromising."

"That's my armor. I daren't wear ordinary clothes, lest every arrow should pierce me."

A bell sounded. They returned to the concert room. When the second part was over Heath looked at Mrs. Mansfield and said:

"Where are we going?"

They were in the midst of the crowd passing out. Women were winding soft things about their necks, men were buttoning up their coats. For a March wind was about in the great city. She returned his look and smiled.

"Ah! You guessed! It's the gallery, I suppose. I'm not accustomed to all this fun. Isn't it amazing what a groove one lives in? Berkeley Square shadows the whole of my life I begin to believe."

"Don't say the motor is waiting!"

"No, it isn't."

"Shall we go to some preposterous place—to the Monico?"

"Where you like. It's just tea time, or coffee time."

They walked to the Monico in the March wind, and went in with a group of Italians, passing the woman who sells foreign papers, and seeing names that transported them to Paris, to Milan, to Rome, to Berlin. A vastness of marble contained a myriad of swarthy strangers, releasing souls astoundingly foreign in vivid gesture and talk. They had coffee with cream like a burgeoning cloud floating airily on the top.

"The only word to describe the effect of all this upon me is spree," said Mrs. Mansfield. "I am out on the spree."

"Capital! And if I stepped right in to your sort of life," said Heath, "would it have the same kind of effect upon me?"

"I don't think it could. It's too conscious, too critical, too fastidious. There's nothing fastidious in a spree. I like the March wind outside, too—the thought of it."

Suddenly her mind went to Charmian and Algiers.

"Charmian's in the sun," she said.

Directly she said this Heath looked slightly self-conscious.

"Have you heard from her?"

"This morning. She has made great friends with Susan Fleet."

"Yes?"

"Oh, a woman we all like, who often helps Adelaide Shiffney with things."

"We all like," he repeated.

"A *cliché!* And indeed I scarcely know Susan Fleet. You see what an absurd close borough I live in, have always lived in. And I never thoroughly realized that till I met you."

"And I live in loneliness, outside of it all, of everything almost."

Lightly she answered:

"With Mrs. Shiffney and others holding open the door, holding up the lamp, and imploring you to come in, to come right in as they say on the other side of the Atlantic."

"You don't do that."

"Do you wish me to?"

"I don't know what I wish. But I am dissatisfied."

He frowned, moving his chair, lit a cigarette, pushed away his coffee cup.

"What is it like at Algiers?"

"Very beautiful, Charmian says. Adelaide and the others have gone off to a desert place called Bou-Saada—"

"Bou-Saada!" he said slowly.

"And Charmian and Susan Fleet are up on the hill at Mustapha Supérieur. They've left the yacht for a few days. They are visiting Arab villas and exploring tropical gardens."

She watched him and sipped her coffee. All the student feeling had gone from her. And now she was deeply aware of the difference between her age and Heath's.

"I suppose they won't be back for a good while," he said.

"Oh, I expect them in a week or two."

"So soon?"

"Adelaide is always in a hurry, and this was only to be quite a short trip."

"Once out there how can they come away so soon? I should want to stay for months. If I once began really to travel there would never be an end to it, unless I were not my own master."

"It's quite extraordinary how you master yourself," Mrs. Mansfield said. "You are a dragon to yourself, and what a

fierce unyielding dragon! It's a fine thing to have such a strong will.

"Ah! But if I let it go!"

"Do you think you ever will?"

"Yes," he said with a sort of deep sadness. "On one side's the will. But on the other side there's an absurd impulsiveness. But don't let's talk any more of me. Do tell me some more about Algiers and your daughter."

When Heath left her that day Mrs. Mansfield said to herself, "If Charmian really does care for him he doesn't know it."

What were Heath's feelings toward Charmian she could not divine. She was unconscious of any desire to baffle her on Heath's part, and was inclined to think that he was so wrapped up in the rather solitary life he had planned out for himself, and in his art, was so detached from the normal preoccupations of strong and healthy young men, that Charmian meant very little, perhaps nothing at all, to him. She had noted, of course, the slightly self-conscious look which had come into Heath's face when she had mentioned Charmian, but she explained that to herself easily enough. Her mention of Charmian in the sun had recalled to him the persistence of Mrs. Shiffney, which he knew she was aware of. In such matters he was like a sensitive boy. He had the peculiar delicacies of the nervously constituted artist, which seem very ridiculous to the average man, but not to the discerning woman. Mrs. Mansfield felt almost sure that his self-consciousness arose not from memories of Charmian, but of Adelaide Shiffney. And she supposed that he was probably quite indifferent to Charmian. It was better so. Although she believed that it was wise for most men to marry, and not very late in life, she excepted Heath from her theory. She could not "see" him married. She could not pick out any girl or woman whom she knew, and say: "That would be the wife for him." Evidently he was one of the exceptional men for whom the normal conditions are not intended. She thought again of his music, and found a reason there. But then she remembered yellow-haired Fan. He was at home with a child, why not with a wife and child of his own? She put aside the problem, but did not resign the thought, "In any case Charmian would be the

wrong woman for him to marry." And when she said that to herself she was thinking solely of the welfare of Heath. Because he was a man, and had been unreserved with her, Mrs. Mansfield instinctively desired to protect his life. She had the feeling, "I understand him better than others." In a chivalrous nature understanding breeds a strong sense of obligation. Mrs. Mansfield felt as if she had duties toward Heath. During the two weeks which elapsed before Charmian's return from Algiers she thought more about his future than about her child's. But she was a very feminine woman and, to her, a man's future always seemed to matter more than a woman's.

Heath, too, had his great talent. That might need protection in the future. Mrs. Mansfield did not believe in an untroubled life for such a man as Heath. There was something disturbing both in his personality and in his music which seemed to her to preclude the possibility of his dwelling always in peace. But she hoped he would be true to his instinct, to the strange instinct which kept him now in a sort of cloistered seclusion. She knew he had friends, acquaintances, made during his time at the College of Music, through the introductions he had brought to London from Cornwall, through family connections. Human intercourse must be part of every life. But she was glad, very glad, that neither Mrs. Shiffney nor Max Elliot had persuaded him into the world where artists are handed on and on till they "know everybody." His words: "Do you know why some men enter the cloister? It's because they feel that if they are not monks they will be libertines," remained with her. Doubtless Heath knew himself. She thought of those who have pursued their art through wildness—Heath's expression—with an inflexibility quite marvellous, an order in the midst of disorder, which to the onlooker seems no less than a miracle. But they were surely Bohemians born, and full of characteristics that were racial. Such characteristics did not exist in Heath, she thought. She pondered. He was surely not a Bohemian. And yet he did not belong to the other race so noticeable in England, the race of the cultured talented, who live well-ordered lives in the calm light of a mild and unobjectionable

publicity, who produce in the midst of comfort, giving birth to nothing on straw, who are sane even to the extent of thinking very much as the man in Sloane Street thinks, who occasionally go to a levée, and have set foot on summer days in the gardens of Buckingham Palace. Heath, perhaps, could not be dubbed with a name. Was he a Bohemian who, for his health's sake, could not live in Bohemia? She remembered the crucifix standing in front of the piano where he passed so many hours, the strange and terrible words he had chosen to set to music, the setting he had given them. It was an uncompromising nature, an uncompromising talent. And yet—there was the other side. There was something ready to rush out to satisfy expectation.

She was deeply interested in Heath.

About ten days after the "spree" at the Monico she received a telegram from Marseilles—"Starting to-night, home the day after to-morrow; love.—CHARMIAN."

Heath dropped in that day, and Mrs. Mansfield mentioned the telegram.

"Charmian will be back on Thursday. I told you Adelaide Shiffney would be in a hurry."

"Then they are not going on to the Greek Isles," he said.

"Not this time."

She glanced at him and thought he was looking rather sad.

"Will you come and dine on Thursday night just with me and Charmian?" she said. "If she is tired with the journey from Paris you may be alone with me. If not, she can tell us about her little African experiences."

"Thank you. Yes, I should like to come very much!"

The strangely imaginative expression, which made his rather plain face almost beautiful, shone in his eyes and seemed to shed a flicker of light about his brow and lips, as he added:

"I have travelled so little that to me there is something almost wonderful in the arrival of someone from Africa. Even the name comes to me always like fire and black mystery. Last night, just before I went to bed, I was reading Chateaubriand, and I came across a passage that kept me awake for hours."

"What was it?"

She leaned a little forward, ready to be fascinated as evidently he had been.

"He is writing of Napoleon, and says of him something like this."

Heath paused, looked down, seemed to make an effort, and continued, with his eyes turned away from Mrs. Mansfield:

"'His enemies, fascinated, seek him and do not see him. He hides himself in his glory, as the lion of the Sahara hides himself in the rays of the sun to escape from the searching eyes of the dazzled hunters.' Isn't that simply gorgeous? It set my imagination galloping. 'As the lion of the Sahara hides himself in the rays of the sun'—by Jove!" He got up. "I was out of England last night. And to think that Miss Charmian is actually arriving from Africa!"

When he was gone Mrs. Mansfield said to herself: "He's a child, too!" And she felt restless and troubled. Naïveté leads men of genius into such unsuitable regions sometimes. It was rather wonderful that he could feel as he did about Africa and refuse to go to Africa. For Adelaide would have taken him anywhere. Would Charmian bring back with her something of the wonder of the East? Mrs. Mansfield felt for a moment as if she were going to welcome a stranger in her child. The feeling returned to her on the Thursday afternoon, when she was waiting for Charmian's arrival in her writing-room.

Charmian was due at Charing Cross at three-twenty-five. She ought to be in Berkeley Square about four, unless the train was very crowded, and there was a long delay at the Customs. Four o'clock chimed from the Dresden china clock on the mantelpiece, and she had not arrived. Mrs. Mansfield was conscious of a restlessness almost amounting to nervousness. She got up from her chair, laid down the book she had been reading, and moved slowly about the room.

How would Charmian receive the news that Claude Heath was to dine with them that night? Would she be too tired by the journey to dine? She was a bad sailor. Perhaps the sea in the Channel had been rough. If so, she would arrive not looking her best. Mrs. Mansfield had invited Heath because she wished to be sure at the first possible moment whether Charmian was in love with him or not. And she was

positive that now, consciously alert and suspicious, if she saw the two together even for a short time she would know.

And if she knew that it was so, that Charmian had set her affections on Heath—what then?

She resolved not to look beyond the day. But as the moments passed, and she waited, her mind, like a thing beyond control, began to occupy itself with that question. The distant hoot of a motor startled her. Although their motor had a horn exactly the same as a thousand others she knew at once that Charmian was entering the Square. Half a minute later, standing in the doorway of her sitting-room, she heard the door bell and the footsteps of Lassell, the butler. Impulsively she went to the staircase.

"Charmian!" she called. "Charmian!"

"My only mother!" came up a voice from below.

She saw Charmian pushing up her veil over her three-cornered travelling-hat with a bright red feather.

"Where are you? Oh, there!"

She came up the stairs.

"Such a crossing! I'm an unlucky girl! Remedies are no use. Dearest!"

She put two light hands on her mother's shoulders and kissed her twice with lips which were rather cold. Her face was pale, and her eyes looked unusually haggard and restless. An atmosphere of excitement seemed to surround her like an aura, Mrs. Mansfield thought. She put her arm through her mother's.

"Tea with you, and then I think I must go to bed. How nice to be in my own dear bed again! I thought of my pillows on board with a yearning that came from the soul, I'm sure. Of course, we left the yacht at Marseilles. The yachting there was such a talk about resolved itself into the two crossings. I wasn't sorry, for we never saw a calm sea except from the shore."

"No? What a shame! Sit here."

Charmian threw herself down with a movement that was very young and began taking off her long gloves. As her thin, pretty hands came out of them, Mrs. Mansfield bent down and kissed her.

"Dear child! How nice to have you safe home!"

"Is it?"

"What a silly question to ask your only mother!"

"This chair makes me feel exactly how tired I am. It tells me."

"Take off your hat."

"Shall I?" She put up her hands, but she left the hat where it was, and her mother did not ask why.

"Is Adelaide back?"

"No, I left her glued to Paris. I crossed with Susan Fleet. Oh!"

She rested her head on the back of the big chair, and shut her eyes.

"Only tea. I can't eat!"

"Here it is."

"I feel as if I'd been away for centuries, as if London must have changed."

"It hasn't."

"And you?"

"Oh, of course, I've shed my nature, as you see!"

"I believe you think I've shed mine."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

Her eyes wandered about the room.

"Everything just the same."

"Then Africa really has made a great difference?"

The alert look that Mrs. Mansfield knew so well came into Charmian's face despite her fatigue.

"Who thought it would?"

"Well, you've never been out of Europe before."

"You did?"

"Wouldn't it be natural if I had fancied it might?"

"Perhaps. But it was only the very edge of Africa. I never went beyond Mustapha Supérieur. I didn't even want to go. I wonder if Susan Fleet did."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm afraid I didn't think very much about it. But I begin to wonder now. I think she's so unselfish that perhaps she makes other people selfish."

"You made great friends, didn't you?"

"Yes. I think she's rather wonderful. She's very unlike other women. She seemed actually glad to give me the address of the place where she gets her coats and skirts. If Theosophy made more women like that I should wish it to spread like cholera in the alleys of Naples. Madre, don't mind me! I was really ill coming across. My head feels all light and empty."

She put up her hands to her temples.

"It's as if everything in my poor little brain-box had been shaken about."

"Poor child! And I've been very inconsiderate."

"Inconsiderate? How?"

"About to-night."

"You haven't accepted a party for me?"

"It isn't so bad as that. But I've invited someone to dinner."

"Mother!" Charmian looked genuinely surprised. "Not Aunt Kitty!"

Aunt Kitty was a sister of Mrs. Mansfield's whom Charmian disliked.

"Oh, no—Claude Heath."

After a slight but perceptible pause, Charmian said:

"Mr. Heath. Oh, you asked him for to-night before you knew I should be here. I see."

"No, I didn't. I thought he would like to hear about your African experiences. I asked him after your telegram came."

Charmian got up slowly, and stood where she could see herself in a mirror without seeming intent on looking in the glass. Her glance to it was very swift and surreptitious, and she spoke, to cover it perhaps.

"I'm afraid I've got very little to tell about Algiers that could interest Mr. Heath. Would you mind very much if I gave it up and dined in bed?"

"Do just as you like. It was stupid of me to ask him. I suppose I acted on impulse without thinking first."

"What time is dinner?"

"Eight as usual."

"I'll lie down and rest and then see how I feel. I'll go now. Nice to be with you again, dearest Madre!"

She bent down and kissed her mother's cheek. The touch of her lips just then was not quite pleasant to Mrs. Mansfield. When she was in her bedroom alone, Charmian took off her hat, and, without touching her hair, looked long and earnestly into the glass that stood on her dressing-table. Then she bent down and put her face close to the glass.

"I look dreadful!" was her comment.

Her maid knocked at the door and was sent away. Charmian undressed herself, got into bed, and lay very still. She felt very interesting, and as if she were going to be involved in interesting and strange events, as if destiny were at work, and were selecting instruments to help on the coming of that which had to be. She thought of her mother as one of these instruments.

It was strange that her mother should have been moved to ask Claude Heath, the man she meant to marry, to come to the house alone on the evening of her return. This action was not a very natural one on her mother's part. It had always been tacitly understood that Heath was Mrs. Mansfield's friend. Yet Mrs. Mansfield had invited him for her daughter. Had thought, for which space does not exist, reached across the sea from child to mother mysteriously, saying to the mother, "Do this!"

But unless the glass told a new tale at seven o'clock Charmian did not mean to go down to dinner.

She closed her eyes and said to herself, again and again, "Look better! Look better! Look better!"

CHAPTER X

WHEN seven o'clock struck she got out of bed, and again looked in the glass. She felt rested in body, and no longer had the tangled sensation in her head. But the face which confronted her reminded her disagreeably of Millie Deans, the American singer. It had what Charmian called the "Pierrot look," a too expressive and unnatural whiteness which surely told secrets. It seemed to her, too, a hard face, too determined in expression, repellent almost. And surely nothing is likely to be more repellent to a man than a girl's face that is hard.

Since her conversation with Susan Fleet by the little lake in the Algerian garden, Charmian had felt that destiny had decreed her marriage with Claude Heath. So she put the matter to herself. Really that conversation had caused her secretly to decide that she would marry Claude Heath.

"It may be so," Susan Fleet had said. "Perhaps part of your destiny is to learn through that man, and to teach him."

The words had gone to join the curious conviction that had come to Charmian out of the white dust floating up from the road that runs through Mustapha, out of the lilies, out of the wrinkled trunk of the great palm that was separated by the yellow-green water from all its fellows, "I shall be here again with him."

Surely the strong assertion of the will is the first step that takes a human being out of the crowd. Charmian had suffered because she was in the crowd, undistinguished, lost like a violet in a prairie abloom with thousands of violets. Something in Algeria, something perhaps in Susan Fleet, had put into her a resolve, unacknowledged even to herself. She had returned to England, meaning to marry Claude Heath, meaning to use her will as the ardent and capable servant of her heart.

But what she said to herself was this, "I believe destiny means to bring us together." She wrapped a naked little fact up in a soft tissue of romance and wonder.

But the face in the glass which now looked at her was too determined, too hard. It startled her. And she changed the expression on it. But then it looked insincere, meretricious, affected, and always haggard.

For a minute Charmian hesitated, almost resolved to go back to bed. But, oh, the dulness of the long evening shut in there! Three hours ago, at Charing Cross Station, she had looked forward to it. But now!

Only once in her life had Charmian made up her face. She knew many girls who disfigured their youth by concealing it with artifice. She thought them rather absurd and rather horrid. Nevertheless she had rouge and powder. One day she had bought them, shut herself in, made up her face, and been thoroughly disgusted with the effect. Yes, but she had done it in a hurry, without care. She had known she was not going to be seen.

Softly she pulled out a drawer.

At half-past seven there was a knock at the door. She opened it and saw her maid.

"If you please, miss, Mrs. Mansfield wishes to know whether you feel rested enough to dine downstairs."

"Yes, I do. Just tell mother, and then come back, please, Halton."

When Halton came Charmian watched her almost as a cat does a mouse, and presently surprised an inquiring look that degenerated into a look of suspicion.

"What's the matter, Halton?"

"Nothing, miss. Which dress will you wear?"

So Halton had guessed, or had suspected—there was not much difference between the two mental processes.

"The green one I took on the yacht."

"Yes, miss."

"Or the—wait a minute."

"Yes, miss?"

"Yes—the green one."

When the maid had taken the dress out Charmian said:

"Why did you look at me as you did just now, Halton? I wish to know."

"I don't know, miss."

"Well, I have put something on."

"Yes, miss."

"I looked so sea-sick—yellow. No one wants to look yellow."

"No, I'm sure, miss."

"But I don't want—come and help me, Halton. I believe you know things I don't."

Halton had been with the lovely Mrs. Charlton Hoey before she came to Charmian, and she did know things unknown to her young mistress. Trusted, she was ready to reveal them, and Charmian went downstairs at three minutes past eight more ingenious than she had been at ten minutes before that hour.

Although she was quite, quite certain that neither her mother nor Claude Heath would discover what had been done with Halton's assistance, she was nevertheless sufficiently uncertain to feel a tremor as she put her hand on the drawing-room door, and it was a tremor in which a sense of shame had a part.

Claude Heath was in the room with Mrs. Mansfield. As Charmian looked at him getting quickly up from the sofa where he had been sitting he seemed to her a stranger. Was this really the man who had made her suffer, weep, confide in Susan Fleet, in Algeria? Had pink roses and dust, far-off and near sounds, movements and stillnesses, and that strange little island spoken to her of him, prophesied to her about him? She had a sense of banality, of disillusion, as if all that had been in her own brain only, almost crazily conceived without any action of events to prompt it.

But when she met his eyes the disagreeable sensation dropped away. For his eyes searched her in a way that made her feel suddenly important. He was looking for Africa, but she did not know it.

Although he did not see what Charmian had done to her face, he noticed change in her. She seemed to him more of a personage than she had seemed before she went away. He was not sure that he liked the change. But it made an

impression upon him. And what he considered as the weakness within him felt a desire to please and conciliate it.

Mrs. Mansfield had seen at a glance that Charmian had touched up her face, but she showed nothing of what she felt, if she felt anything, about this new departure. And when Heath said to Charmian, "How well you are looking!" Mrs. Mansfield added:

"Your rest has done you good."

"Yes, I feel rather less idiotic!" said Charmian; "but only rather. You mustn't expect me to be quite my usual brilliant self, Mr. Heath. You must wait a day or two for that. What have you been doing all this time?"

It seemed to Heath that there was a hint of light patronage in her tone and manner. He was unpleasantly conscious of the woman of the world. But he did not realize how much Charmian had to conceal at this moment.

When almost immediately they went in to dinner, Mrs. Mansfield deliberately turned the conversation to Charmian's recent journey. This was to be Charmian's dinner. Charmian was the interesting person, the traveller from Algeria. Had not Claude Heath been invited to hear all about the trip? Mrs. Mansfield remembered the imaginative look which had transformed his face just before he had quoted Chateaubriand. And she remembered something else, something Charmian had once said to her: "You jump into minds and hearts and poor little I remain outside, squatting, like a hungry child!" She had a sincere horror of the elderly mother who clings to that power which should rightly be in the hands of youth. And to-night something in her heart said: "Give place! give place!" The fact which she had noticed in connection with Charmian's face had suddenly made something within her weep over the child, take herself to task. There was still much impulse in Mrs. Mansfield. To-night a subtlety in Charmian, which no man could have detected, set that impulse in a generous and warm blaze; filled her with a wish to abdicate in the child's favor, to make her the center of the evening's attention, the source of the evening's conversation; to show Heath that Charmian could be as interesting as herself and more attractive than she was.

The difficulty was to obtain the right response from Charmian. She had learnt, and had decided upon so much in Algiers that she was inclined to pretend that Algiers was very uninteresting. She did not fully realize that Claude Heath was naive as well as clever, was very boyish as well as very observant, very concentrated and very determined. And she feared to play the schoolgirl if she made much of her experience. Algiers meant so much to her just then that she belittled Algiers in self-defense.

Heath was chilled by her curt remarks.

"Of course, it's dreadfully French!" she said. "I suppose the conquerors wish to efface all the traces of the conquered as much as possible. I quite understand their feelings. But it's not very encouraging to the desirous tourist."

"Then you were disappointed?" said Heath.

"You should have gone to Bou-Saada," said Mrs. Mansfield. "You would have seen the real thing there. Why didn't you?"

"Adelaide Shiffney started in such a hurry, before I had had time to see anything, or recover from the horrors of yachting. You know how she rushes on as if driven by furies."

There was a small silence. Charmian knew now that she was making the wrong impression, that she was obstinately doing, being, all that was unattractive to Heath. But she was governed by the demon that often takes possession of girls who love and feel themselves unloved. The demon forced her to show a moral unattractiveness that did not really express her character. And realizing that she must be seeming rather horrid in condemning her hostess and representing the trip as a failure, she felt defiant and almost hard.

"Did you envy me?" she said to Heath, almost a little aggressively.

"Well, I thought you must be having a very interesting time. I thought a first visit to Africa must be a wonderful experience."

"But, then—why refuse to come?"

She gazed full into his face, and made her long eyes look impertinent, challenging. Mrs. Mansfield felt very uncomfortable.

"I!" said Heath. "Oh, I didn't know I was in question! Surely we were talking about the impression Algiers made upon you."

"Well, but if you condemn me for not being more enthusiastic, surely it is natural for me to wonder why you wouldn't for anything set foot in the African Paradise."

She laughed. Her nerves felt on edge after the journey. And something in the mental atmosphere affected her unfavorably.

"But, Miss Charmian, I don't condemn you. It would be monstrous to condemn anyone for not being able to feel in a certain way. I hope I have enough brains to see that."

He spoke almost hotly.

"Your mother and I had been imagining that you were having a wonderful time," he added. "Perhaps it was stupid of us."

"No. Algiers is wonderful."

Heath had changed her, had suddenly enabled her to be more natural.

"I include Mustapha, of course. Some of the gardens are marvellous, and the old Arab houses. And I think perhaps you would have thought them more marvellous even than I did."

"But, why?"

"Because I think you could see more in beautiful things than I can, although I love them."

Her sudden softness was touching. Heath had never been paid a compliment that had pleased him so much as hers. He had not expected it, and so it gained in value.

"I don't know that," he said hesitatingly.

"Madretta, don't you agree with me?"

"No doubt you two would appreciate things differently."

"But what I mean is that Mr. Heath in the things we should both appreciate could see more than I."

"Pierce deeper into the heart of the charm? Perhaps he could. Oh, eat a little of this chicken!"

"No, dearest mother, I can't. I'm in a Nebuchadnezzar mood. Spinach for me."

She took some.

"Everything seems a little vague and Channelly to-night, even spinach."

She looked up at Heath, and now he saw a sort of evasive charm in her eyes.

"You must forgive me if I'm tiresome to-night, and remember that while you and Madre have been sitting comfortably in Mullion House and Berkeley Square, I've been roaring across France and rolling on the sea. I hate to be a slave to my body. Nothing makes one feel so contemptible. But I haven't attained to the Susan Fleet stage yet. I'll tell you all about her some day, Mr. Heath, but not now. You would like her. I know that. But perhaps you'll refuse to meet her. Do you know my secret name for you? I call you—the Great Refuser."

Heath flushed and glanced at Mrs. Mansfield.

"I have my work, you see."

"We heard such strange music in Algiers," she answered. "I suppose it was ugly. But it suggested all sorts of things to me. Adelaide wished Monsieur Rades was with us. He's clever, but he could never do a big thing. Could he, mother?"

"No, but he does little things beautifully."

"What it must be to be able to do a big thing!" said Charmian. "To draw in color and light and perfume and sound, and to know you will be able to weave them together, and transform them, and give them out again with you in them, making them more strange, more wonderful. We saw an island, Susan Fleet and I, that—well, if I had had genius I could have done something exquisite the day I saw it. It seemed to say to me: 'Tell them! Tell them! Make them feel me! Make them know me! All those who are far away, who will never see me, but who would love me as you do, if they knew me.' And—it was very absurd, I know!—but I felt as if it were disappointed with me because I had no power to obey it. Madre, don't you think that must be the greatest joy and privilege of genius, that capacity for getting into close relations with strange and beautiful things? I couldn't obey the little island, and I felt almost as if I had done it a wrong."

"Where was it? In the sea?"

"No—oh, no! But I can't tell you! It has to be seen—"

Suddenly there came upon her again, almost like a cloud enveloping her, the strong impression that destiny would lead her some day to that Garden of the Island with Heath. She did not look at him. She feared if she did he would know what was in her mind and heart. Making an effort, she recovered her self-command, and said:

"I expect you think I'm a rather silly and rhapsodizing girl, Mr. Heath. Do you mind if I tell you what *I* think?"

"No, tell me please!" he said quickly.

"Well, I think that, if you've got a great talent, perhaps genius, you ought to give it food. And I think *you* don't want to give it food."

"Swinburne's food was Putney!" said Mrs. Mansfield, "and I could mention many great men who scarcely moved from their own firesides and yet whose imagination was nearly always in a blaze."

Heath joined in eagerly, and the discussion lasted till the end of dinner. Never before had Charmian felt herself to be on equal terms with her mother and Heath. She was secretly excited and she was able to give herself to her excitement. It helped her, pushed on her intelligence. She saw that Heath found her more interesting than usual. She began to realize that her journey had made her interesting to him. He had refused to go, and now was envying her because she had not refused. Her depreciation of Algiers had been a mistake. She corrected it now. And she saw that she had a certain influence upon Heath. She attributed it to her secret assertion of her will. She was not going to sit down any longer and be nobody, a pretty graceful girl who didn't matter. Will is everthing in the world. Now she loved she had a fierce reason for using her will. Even her mother, who knew her in every mood, was surprised by Charmian that evening.

Heath stayed till rather late. When he got up to go away, Charmian said:

"Don't you wish you had come on the yacht? Don't you wish you had seen the island?"

He hesitated, looking down on her and Mrs. Mansfield, and holding his hands behind him. After a strangely long pause he answered:

"I don't want to wish that, I don't mean to wish it."

"Do you really think we can control our desires?" she asked, and now she spoke very gravely, almost earnestly.

"I suppose so. Why not?"

"Oh!" she said petulantly. "You remind me of Oliver Cromwell—somebody of that kind—you ought to have lived in Puritan days. It's England—England—England in you shrivelling you up. I'm sure in all Algiers there isn't one person (not English) who thinks as you do. But if you were to travel, if you were to give yourself a chance, how different you'd be!"

"Charmian, you impertinent child!" said Mrs. Mansfield, smiling, but in a voice that was rather sad.

"It's the Channel! It's the Channel! I'm not myself to-night!"

Heath laughed and said something light and gay. But as he went out of the room his face looked troubled.

As soon as he had gone, Charmian got up and turned to her mother.

"Are you very angry with me, Madre?"

"No. There always was a touch of the minx in you, and I suppose it is ineradicable. What have you been doing to your face?"

Charmian flushed. The blood even went up to her forehead, and for once she looked confused, almost ashamed.

"My face? You—you have noticed something?"

"Of course, directly you came down. Has Adelaide taught you that?"

"No! Are you angry, mother?"

"No. But I like young things to look really young as long as they can. And to me the first touch of make-up suggests the useless struggle against old age. Now I'm not very old yet, not fifty. But I've let my hair become white."

"And how it suits you, my beautiful mother!"

"That's my little compensation. A few visits to Bond Street might make me look ten years younger than I do, but

if I paid them, do you know I think I should lose one or two friendships I value very much."

Mrs. Mansfield paused.

"Lose—friendships?" Charmian almost faltered.

"Yes. Some of the best men value sincerity of appearance in a woman more than perhaps you would believe to be possible."

"In friendship!" Charmian almost whispered.

Again there was a pause. Mrs. Mansfield knew very well that a sentence from her at this moment would provoke in Charmian an outburst of sincerity. But she hesitated to speak that sentence. For a voice within her whispered, "Am I on Charmian's side?"

After a moment she got up.

"Bedtime," she said.

"Yes, yes."

Charmian kissed her mother lightly first on one eyelid then on the other.

"Dearest, it is good to be back with you."

"But you loved Algiers, I think."

"Did I? I suppose I did."

"I must get a book," said Mrs. Mansfield, going toward a bookcase.

When she turned round with a volume of Browning in her hand Charmian had vanished.

Mrs. Mansfield did not regret the silence that had saved her from Charmian's sincerity. In reply to it what could she have said to help her child toward happiness?

For did not the fact that Charmian had made up her face because she loved Claude Heath show a gulf between her and him that could surely never be bridged?

CHAPTER XI

HEATH was troubled and was angry with himself for being troubled. Looking back it seemed to him that he had taken a false step when he consented to that dinner with Max Elliot. Surely since that evening he had never been wholly at peace. And yet on that evening he had entered into his great friendship with Mrs. Mansfield. He could not wish that annulled. It added value to his life. But Mrs. Shiffney and Charmian in combination had come into his life with her. And they began to vex his spirit. He felt as if they represented a great body of opinion which was set against a deep conviction of his own. Their motto was, "The world for the artist." And what was his, or what had been his until now? "His world within the artist." He had fed upon himself, striving rather to avoid than to seek outside influences. After Charmian's return from Africa a persistent doubt assailed him. His strong instinct might be a blind guide. The opinion of the world, represented by the shrewd married woman and the intelligent girl, might have reason on its side.

Certainly Charmian's resolute assertion of herself on the evening of her return had been surprisingly effective. In an hour she had made an impression upon Heath such as she had failed to make in many weeks of their previous acquaintanceship. Her attack had gone home. "If you were to give yourself a chance how different you'd be!" And then her outburst about the island! There had been truth in it. Color and light and perfume and sound are material given out to the artist. He takes them, uses them, combines them, makes them his. He helps them! Ah! That was the word! He, as it were, gives them wings so that they may fly into the secret places, into the very hearts of men.

Heath looked round upon his hermitage, the little house near St. Petersburg Place, and he was companioned by fears. His energies weakened. The lack of self-confidence, which

often affected him when he was divorced from his work, began to distress him when he was working. He disliked what he was doing. Music, always the most evasive of the arts, became like a mist in his sight. There were moments when he hated being a composer, when he longed to be a poet, a painter, a sculptor. Then he would surely at least know whether what he was doing was good or bad. Now, though he was inclined to condemn, he did not feel certain even of ineptitude.

Mrs. Searle noted the change in her master, and administered her favorite medicine, Fan, with increasing frequency. As the neurasthenic believes in strange drugs, expensive cures, impressive doctors, she believed in the healing powers of the exceedingly young. Nor was Fan doubtful of her own magical properties. She supposed that her intense interest in herself and the affairs of her life was fully shared by Heath. Her confidences to him in respect of Masterman and other important matters were unbridled. She seldom strove to charm by listening, and never by talking to Heath about himself. Her method of using herself as a draught of healing was to draw him into the current of her remarkable life, to set him floating on the tides of her fate.

Heath had a habit of composing after tea, from five or five-thirty onward. And Fan frequently appeared at the studio door about half-past four, turned slightly sideways with an expectant glance into the large room with the book-lined walls, the dim paintings, and the orange-colored curtains. A faint air of innocent coquetry hung about her. After a pause and a smile from Heath, she would move forward with hasty confidence, sometimes reaching the hearthrug with a run. She was made welcome, petted, apparently attended to with a whole mind. But while she delivered her soul of its burden, at great length and with many indrawn breaths and gusts of feeling, Heath was often saying to himself, "Am I provincial?"

The word rankled now that Charmian had spoken out with such almost impertinent abruptness. Had he then lost faith in Mrs. Mansfield? She had never said that she wished him different from what he was. And indirectly she had praised his music. He knew it had made a powerful impression upon

her. Nevertheless, he could not forget Charmian's words. Nor could he help linking her with Mrs. Shiffney in his mind.

Fan pulled at his sleeve, raising her voice. He was reminded of a little dog clawing to attract attention.

"Yes, Fantail! I mean no, of course not! If Masterman refuses to take a bath, of course you are obliged to punish him. Yes, yes, I know. Wear something? What? What's that? Like you? But he's a man. Very well, we'll get him a pair of trousers. No, I won't forget. Yes, like mine, long ones like mine. It'll be all right. Take care with that cup. I think mother must be wanting you. Press the bell hard. Well, use your thumb then. That's it—harder. There, you see, mother does want you. Harriet says so."

Harriet, discreet almost to dumbness though she was, was capable of receiving a hint conveyed by her master's expressive eyebrows. And Fan passed on, leaving Heath alone with his piano. He played what he had played to Mrs. Mansfield to reassure himself. But he was not wholly reassured. And he knew that desire for a big verdict which often tortures the unknown creator. This was a new and, he thought, ugly phase in his life. Was he going to be like the others? Was he going to crave for notoriety? Why had the words of a mere girl, of no unusual cleverness or perception, had such an effect upon him? How thin she had looked that day when she emerged from her furs. That was before she started for Africa. The journey had surely made a great difference in her. She had come back more of a personage, more resolute. He felt the will in her as he had not felt it before. Till she came back he had only felt the strong soul in her mother. That was like an unwavering flame. How Mrs. Mansfield's husband must have loved her.

And Heath's hands slipped from the piano, and he dreamed over women.

He was conscious of solitude.

Susan Fleet was now in town. After the trip to Algiers she had been to Folkestone to visit her mother and dear old Mrs. Simpkins. She had also combined business with pleasure and been fitted for a new coat and skirt. A long telegram from Adelaide Shiffney called her back to London to under-

take secretarial and other duties. As the season approached Mrs. Shiffney's life became increasingly agitated. Miss Fleet was an excellent hand at subduing, or, if that were impossible, at getting neatness into agitation. She knew well how to help fashionable women to be absurd with method. She made their silliness almost business-like, and assisted them to arrange their various fads in apple-pie order. Amid their often hysterical lives she moved with a coolness that was refreshing even to them. She never criticized their actions except sometimes by tacitly declining to join in them. And they seldom really wanted her to do that. Her value to them would have been diminished, if not destroyed, had she been quite as they were.

For the moment she was in Grosvenor Square.

Charmian envied Adelaide Shiffney. But she was resolved to see more of Miss Fleet at whatever cost. Recently she had been conscious of a tiny something, not much more than a thread, dividing her from her mother. Since her mother knew that she had made up her face on Claude Heath's account, she had often felt self-conscious at home. Knowing that, her mother, of course, knew more. If Charmian had told the truth she would not have minded the fact that it was known. But she did mind very much its being known when she had not told it. Sometimes she said to herself that she was being absurd, that Mrs. Mansfield knew, even suspected, nothing. But unfortunately she was a woman and, therefore, obliged to be horribly intelligent in certain directions. Her painted cheeks and delicately-darkened eyelashes had spoken what her lips had never said. It was vain to pretend the contrary. And she sedulously pretended it.

Her sense of separation from her mother made Charmian the more desirous of further intercourse with Susan Fleet. She felt as if only Miss Fleet could help her, though how she did not know. After repeated attempts on her part a meeting was at last arranged, and one afternoon the Theosophist made her appearance in Berkeley Square and was shown upstairs to Charmian's little sitting-room.

Charmian was playing a Polonaise of Chopin's on a cottage piano. She played fairly well, but not remarkably. She had

been trained by a competent master and had a good deal of execution. But her playing lacked that grip and definite intention which are the blood and bone of a performance. Several people thought nevertheless that it was full of charm.

"Oh, Susan!"—she stopped abruptly on a diminished seventh. "Come and sit here! May I?"

She kissed the serene face, clasping the white-gloved hands with both of hers.

"Another from Folkestone?"

"Yes."

"What a fit! I simply must go there. D'you like my little room?"

Susan looked quietly round, examining the sage-green walls, the water-colors, the books in Florentine bindings, the chairs and sofas covered with chintz, which showed a bold design of purple grapes with green leaves, the cream-colored rough curtains, and Charmian's dachshund, Caroline, who lay awake before the small fire which burned in a grate lined with Morris tiles.

"Yes, I like it very much. It looks like your home and as if you were fond of it."

"I am, so far as one can be fond of a room."

She paused, hesitating, thinking of the little island and her sudden outburst, longing to return at once to the subject which secretly obsessed her, yet fearing to seem childish, too egoistic, perhaps naively indiscreet. Susan looked at her with a friendly gaze.

"How are things going with you? Are you happier than you were at Mustapha?"

"You mean—about that?"

"I'm afraid you have been worrying."

"Do I look uglier?" cried Charmian, almost with sharpness.

Susan Fleet could not help smiling, but in her smile there was no sarcasm, only a gentle, tolerant humor.

"I hardly know. People say my ideas about looks are all crazy. I can't admire many so-called beauties, you see. There's more expression in your face, I think. But I don't know that I should call it happy expression."

"I wish I were like you. I wish I could feel indifferent to happiness!"

"I don't suppose I am indifferent. Only I don't feel that every small thing of to-day has power over me, any more than I feel that a grain of dust which I can flick from my dress makes me unclean. It's a long journey we are making. And I always think it's a great mistake to fuss on a journey."

"I don't know anyone who can give me what you do," said Charmian.

"It's a long journey up the Ray," said Susan.

"The Ray?" said Charmian, seized with a sense of mystery.

"The bridge that leads from the personal which perishes to the immortal which endures."

"I can't help loving the personal. I'm not like you. I do love the feeling of definite personality, separated from everything, mine, me. It's no use pretending."

"Pretence is always disgusting."

"Yes, of course. But still—never mind, I was only going to say something you wouldn't agree with."

Susan did not ask what it was, but quietly turned the conversation, and soon succeeded in ridding Charmian of her faint self-consciousness.

"I want you to meet—him."

At last Charmian had said it, with a slight flush.

"I have met him," returned Miss Fleet, in her powerful voice.

"What!" cried Charmian, on an almost indignant note.

"I met him last night."

"How could you? Where? He never goes to anything!"

"I went with Adelaide to the Elgar Concert at Queen's Hall. He was there with a musical critic, and happened to be next to us."

Charmian looked very vexed and almost injured.

"Mrs. Shiffney—and you talked to him?"

"Oh, yes. Adelaide introduced us."

There was a silence. Then Charmian said:

"I don't suppose he was his real self—with Adelaide Shiffney. But did you like him?"

"I did. I thought him genuine. And one sees the spirit clearly in his face."

"I'm sure he liked you."

"I really don't know."

"I do. Did he—did you—either of you say anything about me?"

"Certainly we did."

"Did he—did he seem—did you notice whether he was at all—? Caroline, be quiet!"

The dachshund, who had shown signs of an intention to finish her reverie on Charmian's knees, blinked, looked guilty, lay down again, turned over on her left side with her back to her mistress, and heaved a sigh that nearly degenerated into a whimper.

"I suppose he talked most of the time with Mrs. Shiffney?"

"Well, we had quite five minutes together. I spoke about our time at Mustapha."

"Did he seem interested?"

"Very much, I thought."

"Very much! Oh, Susan! But he has a manner of seeming interested. It may not mean anything. But still I do think since I have come back he sees that I am not quite a nonentity. He has been here several times, for mother of course. Even now I have never heard his music. But there is a difference. I believe in such a place as London unless one has resolution to assert oneself people think one is a sort of shadow. I have so often thought of what you said about my perhaps having to learn through Claude Heath and to teach him, too. Sometimes when I look at him I feel it must be so. But what have I to teach? D'you know since—since—well, it makes me feel humble often. And yet I know that the greatest man needs help. Men are a sort of children. I've often been surprised by the childishness of really big men. Please tell me all he said to you."

Very calmly Susan told. She had just finished, and Charmian was about to speak again, when Mrs. Mansfield opened the door. Charmian sprang up so abruptly that Caroline was startled into a husky bark.

"Oh, Madre! Susan Fleet is here!"

Mrs. Mansfield knew at once that she had broken in upon a confidential interview, not by Miss Fleet's demeanor, but by Charmian's. But she did not show her knowledge. She sat

down and joined pleasantly in the talk. She had often seen Miss Fleet in London, but she did not know her well. At once she realized that Charmian had found an excellent friend. And she was not jealous because of the confidence given but not given to her. Youth, she knew, is wilful and must have its way. The nearest, for some inscrutable reason, are generally told the least.

When Miss Fleet went away, Mrs. Mansfield said:

"That is one of the most thoroughbred human beings I have ever seen. No wonder the greatest snobs like her. There is nothing a snob hates so much as snobbery in another. *Viva* to your new friend, Charmian!"

She wondered a little whether Miss Fleet's perception of character was as keen as her breeding was definite, when she heard that Claude Heath had met her.

Heath told Mrs. Mansfield this. Miss Fleet had made a strong impression upon him. At the moment when he had met her he had felt specially downcast. The musical critic, with whom he had gone to the concert, had been a fellow student with him at the Royal College. Being young the critic was very critical, very sure of himself, very decisive in his worship of the new idols and in his scathing contempt for the old. He spoke of Mendelssohn as if the composer of *Elijah* had earned undying shame, of Gounod as if he ought to have been hanged for creating his *Faust*. His glorification of certain modern impressionists in music depressed Heath, almost as much as his abuse of the dead who had been popular, and who were still appreciated by some thousands, perhaps millions, of nobodies. He made Heath, in his discontented condition, feel as if all art were futile.

"Why give up everything," he thought, "merely to earn in the end the active contempt of men who have given up nothing? What is it that drives me on? A sort of madness, perhaps, something to be rooted out."

He almost shivered as the conviction came to him that he must have been composing for posterity, since he did not desire present publicity. No doubt he had tried to trick himself into the belief that he had toiled for himself alone, paid the tribute of ardent work to his own soul. Now he asked him-

self, with bitter scepticism: "Does any man really ever do that?" And his world seemed to fall about him like shadows dropping down into a void.

Then came his five minutes of talk with Susan Fleet.

When Heath spoke of it to Mrs. Mansfield he said:

"I was a cripple when we began. When we stopped I felt as if I could climb to a peak. And she said nothing memorable. But I had been in her atmosphere."

"And you are very susceptible to atmosphere."

"Too susceptible. That's why I keep so much to myself."

"I know—the cloister."

She looked at him earnestly, even searchingly. He slightly reddened, looked down, said slowly:

"It's not a natural life, the life of the cloister."

"Perhaps you mean to come out."

"I don't know what I mean. I am all at a loose end lately."

"Since when?"

Her eyes were still on him.

"I hardly know. Perhaps hearing about Africa, of that voyage I might have made, unsettled me. I'm a weakling, I'm afraid."

"Very strong in one way."

"Very weak in another, perhaps. It would have been better to go and have done with it, than to brood over not having gone."

"You are envying Charmian?"

"Some days I envy everyone who isn't Claude Heath," he answered evasively, with a little covering laugh. "Of one thing I am quite sure, that I wish I were a male Miss Fleet. She knows what few people know."

"What is that?"

"What is small and what is great."

"And you found that out in five minutes at a concert?"

"Elgar's is music that helps the perceptions."

Mrs. Mansfield's perceptions were very keen. Yet she was puzzled by Heath. She realized that he was disturbed and attributed that disturbance to Charmian. Had he suspected, or found out, that Charmian imagined herself to be in love with him? He came as usual to the house. His friendship with

Mrs. Mansfield did not seem to her to have changed. But his relation to Charmian was not what it had been. Indeed, it was scarcely possible that it should be so. For Charmian had continued to be definite ever since her drastic remarks at dinner on the evening of her return. She bantered Heath, laughed at him, patronized him in the pretty way of a pretty London girl who takes the world for her own with the hands of youth. When she found him with her mother she did not glide away, or remain as a mere listener while they talked. She stayed to hold her own, sometimes even—so her mother thought, not without pathos—a little aggressively.

Heath's curious and deep reserve, which underlay his apparent quick and sensitive readiness to be sympathetic with those about him, to give them what they wanted of him, was not abated by Charmian's banter, her delicate impertinences, her laughing attacks. Mrs. Mansfield noticed that. He turned to her still when he wished to speak for a moment out of his heart.

But he was becoming much more at home in Charmian's company. She stirred him at moments into unexpected bursts of almost boyish gaiety. She knew how to involve him in eager arguments.

One day, as he was about to leave the house in Berkeley Square he said to Mrs. Mansfield:

"Miss Charmian ought to have some big object in life on which she could concentrate. She has powers, you know."

When he was gone Mrs. Mansfield smiled and sighed.

"And when will he find out that he is Charmian's big object in life?" she thought.

She knew men well. Nevertheless, their stupidities sometimes surprised her. It was as if something in them obstinately refused to see.

"It's their blindness that spoils us," she said to herself. "If they could see, we should have ten commandments to obey—perhaps twenty."

CHAPTER XII

TOWARD the end of the London season the management of the Covent Garden Opera House startled its subscribers by announcing for production a new opera, composed by a Frenchmen called Jacques Sennier, whose name was unknown to most people. Mysteriously, as the day drew near for the first performance of this work, which was called *Le Paradis Terrestre*, the inner circles of the musical world were infected with an unusual excitement. Whispers went round that the new opera was quite extraordinary, epoch-making, that it was causing a prodigious impression at rehearsal, that it was absolutely original, that there was no doubt of its composer's genius. Then reports as to the composer's personality and habits began to get about. Mrs. Shiffney, of course, knew him. But she had introduced him to nobody. He was her personal prey at present. She, however, allowed it to be known that he was quite charming, but the strangest creature imaginable. It seemed that he had absolutely no moral sense, did not know what it meant. If he saw an insect trodden upon, or a fly killed on a window-pane, he could not work for days. But when his first wife—he had been married at sixteen—shot herself in front of him, on account of his persistent cruelty and infidelity, he showed no sign of distress, had the body carried out of his studio, and went on composing. Decidedly an original! Everybody was longing to know him. The libraries and the box-office of the Opera House were bombarded with demands for seats for the first performance, at which the beautiful Annie Meredith, singer, actress, dancer, speculator, and breeder of prize bulldogs, was to appear in the heroine's part.

Three nights before the première, a friend, suddenly plunged into mourning by the death of a relation, sent Mrs. Mansfield her box. Charmian was overjoyed. Max Elliot, Lady Mildred Burnington, Margot and Kit Drake, Paul Lane,

all her acquaintances, in fact, were already "raving" about Jacques Sennier, without knowing him, and about his opera, without having heard it. Sensation, success, they were in the air. Not to go to this première would be a disaster. Charmian's instinctive love of being "in" everything had caused her to feel acute vexation when her mother had told her that their application for stalls had been refused. Now, at the last moment, they had one of the best boxes in the house.

"Whom shall we take?" said Mrs. Mansfield. "There's room for four."

"Why not invite Mr. Heath?" said Charmian, with a rather elaborate carelessness. "As he's a musician it might interest him."

"I will if you like. But he's sure to refuse."

Of late Heath had retired into his shell. Mrs. Shiffney had not seen him for months. Max Elliot had given him up in despair. Even in Berkeley Square he was but seldom visible. His excuse for not calling was that he knew nobody had any time to spare in the season.

"Don't write to him, Madre, or he will. Get him to come here and ask him. He really ought to follow the progress of his own art, silly fellow. I have no patience with his absurd fogeydom."

She spoke with the lightest scorn, but in her long eyes there was an intentness which contradicted her manner.

Heath came to the house, was invited to come to the box, and had just refused when Charmian entered the room.

"You're afraid, Mr. Heath," she said, smiling at him.

"Afraid! What of?" he asked quickly, and a little defiantly.

"Afraid of hearing what the foreign composers of your own age are doing, of comparing their talents with your own. That's so English! Never mind what the rest of the world is about! We'll go on in our own way! It seems so valiant, doesn't it? And really it's nothing but cowardice, fear of being forced to see that others are advancing while we are standing still. I'm sick of English stolidity!"

Heath's eyes shown with something that looked like anger.

"I really don't think I'm afraid!" he said stiffly.

Perhaps to prove that he was not, he rescinded his refusal and came to the première with the Mansfields. It was a triumph for Charmian, but she did not show that she knew it.

Heath was in his most reserved mood. He had the manner of the defiant male lured from behind his defenses into the open against his will. Some intelligence within him knew that his cold stiffness was rather ridiculous, and made him unhappy. Mrs. Mansfield was really sorry for him.

Nothing is more humorously tragic than pleasure indulged in under protest. And Heath's protest was painfully apparent.

Charmian, who was looking her best, her most self-possessed, a radiant minx, with fleeting hints of depths and softnesses, half veiled by the firm habit of the world, seemed to tower morally above the composer. He marvelled afresh at the triumphant composure of modern girlhood. Sitting between the two women in the box—no one else had been asked to join them—he looked out, almost shyly, at the crowded and brilliant house. Mrs. Shiffney, large, powerful and glittering with jewels, came into a box immediately opposite to theirs, accompanied by Ferdinand Rades, Paul Lane, and a very smart, very French, and very ugly woman, who was covered thickly with white paint, and who looked like all the feminine intelligence of Paris beneath her perfectly-dressed red hair. In the box next the stage on the same side were the Max Elliots with Sir Hilary Burnington and Lady Mildred.

Charmian looked eagerly about the house, putting up her opera-glasses, finding everywhere friends and acquaintances. She frankly loved the world with the energy of her youth.

At this moment the sight of the huge and crowded theater, full of watchful eyes and whispering lips, full of brains and souls waiting to be fed, the sound of its hum and stir, sent a warm thrill through her, thrill of expectation, of desire. She thought of that man, Jacques Sennier, hidden somewhere, the cause of all that was happening in the house, of all that would happen almost immediately upon the stage. She envied him with intensity. Then she looked at Claude Heath's rather grim and constrained expression. Was it possible that Heath did not share her feeling of envy?

There was a tap at the door. Heath sprang up and opened it. Paul Lane's pale and discontented face appeared.

"Halloa! Haven't seen you since that dinner! May I come in for a minute?"

He spoke to the Mansfields.

"Perfectly marvellous! Everyone behind the scenes is mad about it! Annie Meredith says she will make the success of her life in it. Who's that Frenchwoman with Adelaide Shiffney? Madame Sennier, the composer's wife—his second, the first killed herself. Very clever woman. She's not going to kill herself. Sennier says he could do nothing without her, never would have done this opera but for her. She found him the libretto, kept him at it, got the Covent Garden management interested in it, persuaded Annie Meredith to come over from South America to sing the part. An extraordinary woman, ugly, but a will of iron, and an ambition that can't be kept back. Her hour of triumph to-night. There goes the curtain."

As Lane slipped out of the box, he whispered to Heath:

"Mrs. Shiffney hopes you'll come and speak to her between the acts. Her name's on the door."

Heath sat down a little behind Mrs. Mansfield. Although the curtain was now up he noticed that Charmian, with raised opera-glasses, was earnestly looking at Mrs. Shiffney's box. He noticed, too, that her left hand shook slightly, almost imperceptibly.

"Her hour of triumph!" Yes, the hour proved to be that. Madame Sennier's energies had not been expended in vain. From the first bars of music, from the first actions upon the stage, the audience was captured by the new work. There was no hesitating. There were no dangerous moments. The evening was like a crescendo, admirably devised and carried out. And through it all Charmian watched the ugly white face of the red-haired woman opposite to her, lived imaginatively in that woman's heart and brain, admired her, almost hated her, longed to be what she was.

Between the acts she saw men pouring into Mrs. Shiffney's box. And every one was presented to the ugly woman, whose vivacity and animation were evidently intense, who seemed

to demand homage as a matter of course. Several foreigners kissed her hand. Max Elliot's whole attitude, as he bent over her, showed adoration and enthusiasm. Even Paul Lane was smiling, as he drew her attention to a glove split by his energy in applause.

Heath had spoken of Mrs. Shiffney's message. He was evidently reluctant to obey it, but Charmian insisted on his going.

"I want to know what Madame Sennier is like. You must ask her if she is happy, find out how happy she is."

"Charmian, Mr. Heath isn't a mental detective!"

"I speak such atrocious French!" said Heath, looking nervous and miserable.

"I suppose you can say, '*Chère Madame, j'espère que vous êtes bien contente ce soir?*' "

When Heath had left the box Mrs. Mansfield said gravely to her daughter:

"Charmian!"

"Yes, Madretta."

"I don't think you are behaving very kindly this evening. You scarcely seem to remember that Mr. Heath is our guest."

"Against his will," she said, in a voice that was almost hard. There was a hardness, too, in her whole look and manner.

"I think that only makes the hostess's obligation the stronger," said Mrs. Mansfield. "I don't at all like the Margot manner with men."

"I'm sorry, Madre; but I had no idea I was imitating Margot Drake."

Mrs. Mansfield said no more. Charmian, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, turned to look once more at Adelaide Shiffney's box.

In about three minutes she saw Mrs. Shiffney glance behind her. Max Elliot, who was still with her, got up and opened the door, and Heath stood in the background. Charmian frowned and pressed her little teeth on her lower lip. Her body felt stiff with attention, with scrutiny. She saw Heath come forward, Max Elliot holding him by the arm, and talking eagerly and smiling. Mrs. Shiffney smiled, too, laughed, gave

him her powerful hand. Now he was being introduced to Madame Sennier, who surely appraised him with one swift, almost cruelly intelligent glance.

His French! His French! Charmian trembled for it, for him because of it. If Mrs. Mansfield could have known how solicitous, how tender, how motherly, the girl felt at that moment under her mask of shining, radiant hardness! But Mrs. Mansfield was glancing about the house with grave and even troubled eyes.

Heath was talking to Madame Sennier. He was even sitting down beside her. She spoke, evidently with volubility, making rapid gestures with her hands. Then she paused. She was listening attentively to Heath. Mrs. Shiffney and Elliot listened, too, as if absorbed. Heath's French must really be excellent. Why had he—? If only she could hear what he was saying! She tingled with curiosity. How he held them, those three people! From here he looked distinguished, interesting. He stood out even in this crowd as an interesting man. Madame Sennier made an upward movement of her head, full of will. She put out her hand, and laid it on Heath's arm. Now they all seemed to be talking together. Madame Sennier looked radiant, triumphant, even autocratic. She pointed toward the stage emphatically, made elaborate descriptive movements with her hands. A bell sounded somewhere. Heath got up. In a moment he and Max Elliot had left the box together. The two women were alone. They leaned toward each other apparently in earnest conversation.

"I know they are talking about him! I know they are!"

Charmian actually formed the words with her lips. The curtain rose as Heath quietly entered the box. Charmian did not turn to him or look at him then. Only when the act was over did she move and say:

"Well, Mr. Heath, your French evidently comes at call."

"What—oh, we were talking in English!"

"Madame Sennier speaks English?" said Mrs. Mansfield.

"Excellently!"

Charmian felt disappointed.

"Is she happy?" she asked, moving her hand on the edge of the box.

"She seems so."

"Did you tell her what you thought?"

"Yes," said Heath.

His voice had become suddenly deeper, more expressive.

"I told her that I thought it wonderful. And so it is. She said—in French this: 'Ah, my friend, wait till the last act. Then it is no longer the earthly Paradise!'"

There was a moment of silence. Then Charmian said, in a voice that sounded rather dry:

"You liked her?"

"I don't know. Yes, I think I did. We were all rather carried away, I suppose."

"Carried away! By what?"

"Well, it is evidently a great moment in Madame Sennier's life. One must sympathize."

Charmian looked and saw two spots of color burning high up on his cheeks. His voice had suddenly quivered.

"I should think so," said Mrs. Mansfield. "This evening probably means more to Madame Sennier even than to her husband."

Charmian said nothing more till the end of the evening. Beneath the radiant coolness of her demeanor, the air of triumphant self-possession, she was secretly quivering with excitement. She feared to betray herself. Soon she was spellbound by the music of the last act and by the wonderful performance of Annie Meredith. As she listened, leaning forward in the box, and always feeling intensely the nearness to her of Heath, and of Heath's strong musical talent, she remembered something she had once said in the drawing-room in Berkeley Square, "We want a new note." Here was the new note in French music, the new talent given to the wondering and delighted world to-night. To-morrow doubtless Europe and America would know that the husband of the red-haired woman opposite had taken his place among the famous men to whom the world must pay attention. From to-morrow thousands of art lovers would be looking toward Jacques Sennier with expectation, the curious expectation of those who crave for fresh food on which they may feed their intellects, and their souls. The great tonic of a new development in art

was offered to all those who cared to take it by the man who would probably be staring from behind the footlights at the crowd in a few moments.

If only the new note had been English!

"It shall be! It shall be!" Charmian repeated to herself.

She looked again and again at Madame Sennier, striving to grasp the secret of her will for another, even while she gave herself to the enchantment of the music. But for that woman in all probability the music would never have been given life. Somewhere, far down in the mystery of an individual, it would have lain, corpse-like. A woman had willed that it should live. She deserved the homage she had received, and would receive to-night. For she had made her man do a great thing, because she had helped him to understand his own greatness.

Suddenly, out of the almost chaotic excitement caused in Charmian by the music, and by her secret infatuation, concrete knowledge seemed to detach itself and to arise. As, when she had looked at the island in the Algerian Garden, she had felt "I shall be here some day with him!" so now she seemed to be aware that the future would show a brilliant crowd assembled in some great theater, not for Jacques Sennier, but for one near her. Really she was violently willing that it should be so. But she thought she was receiving—from whom, or from what, she could not tell—a mysterious message.

And the red-haired woman's place was filled by another.

At last the curtain fell on the final scene, and the storm which meant a triumph was unchained. Heath sprang up from his seat, carried away by a generous enthusiasm. He did not know how to be jealous of anyone who could do a really fine thing. Charmian, in the midst of the uproar, heard him shouting "Bravo!" behind her, in a voice quick with excitement. His talent was surely calling to a brother. The noise all over the house strengthened gradually, then abruptly rose like a great wave. A small, thin, and pale man, with a big nose, a mighty forehead, scanty black hair and beard, and blinking eyes, had stepped out before the curtain. He leaned forward, made a movement as if to retreat, was stopped by a louder roar, stepped quickly to the middle of the small strip of stage that was visible, and stood still with his big head

slighty thrust out toward the multitude which acclaimed him.

Charmian turned round to Claude Heath, who towered above her. He did not notice her movement. He was gazing at the stage while he violently clapped his hands. She gazed up at him. He felt her eyes, leaned down. For a moment they looked at each other, while the noise in the house increased. Claude saw that Charmian wanted to speak to him—and something else. After a moment, during which the blood rose in his cheeks and forehead, and he felt as if he were out in wind and rain, in falling snow and stern sunshine, he said:

"What is it?"

"All this ought to be for you. Some day it will be—for you!"

CHAPTER XIII

IN the studio of Mullion House that night, Harriet, moving softly, placed a plate of sandwiches and a long bottle of Rhine wine before she went up to bed. Moonlight shone on the scrap of garden, gleamed on the leaded panes of the studio windows, from which the orange-colored curtains were drawn back. The aspect of the big room had changed because it was summer. It looked bigger, less cosy without a fire. One lamp was lighted and cast a gentle glow over the books that lay near it, and over the writing-table on which there were sheets of manuscript music. The piano stood open. A spray of white roses in a tall vase looked spectral against the shadows. After Harriet's departure the clock ticked for a long time in an empty room.

It was nearly two o'clock, and the moon was waning, when the studio door was opened to let in Heath. He was alone. Holding the door with one hand, he stood and stared at the room, examined it with a sort of excited and close attention. Then he took off his hat, shut the door, laid hat and coat on the sofa, went to the table where Harriet had put the tray, and poured out a glass of wine. He sighed, looked at the gold of the wine, made beautiful by the lamplight, drank it, and sat down in the worn armchair which faced the line of window. Then he lit a cigar, leaned back, and smoked, keeping his eyes on the glass.

Upon the leaded panes the faint silver shifted, faded, and presently died. Heath watched, and thought, "The moon gone!" He did not feel as if he could ever wish to sleep again. The excitement within him was like a ravaging disease. He was capable of excitement that never comes to the ordinary man, although he took sedulous care to hide that fact. His imagination bristled like a spear held by one alert for attack. What was life going to do to him? What was he going to let it do?

Charmian Mansfield loved him, and believed in his genius, as he did not believe, or had not till now believed in it. He was loved, he was believed in, by the thin mystery of a modern girl, who had known many men with talents, with names, with big reputations. Under that triumphant composure, that almost cruel banter, that whimsical airy contempt, that cool frivolity of the minx, there was emotion, there was love for him and for his talent. Always that night he thought of his talent in connection with Charmian's love, he scarcely knew why. For how long had she loved him? And why did she love him? He thought of his body, and it surprised him that she loved that. He thought of his mind, his imagination, his temper, his tricks, his faults, his habits. He thought of his deep reserve, and of the intense emotion he sometimes felt when he was quite alone and composing. Sometimes he felt like a great fire then. Sometimes he felt brutal, almost savage, decisive in a sense that was surely cruel. Did she suspect all that? Did she love all that without consciously suspecting it? Sometimes, when he had been working very hard, overworking perhaps, he felt inclined to do evil. If she knew that!

But she did not, she could not know him. Why, then, did she love him? Heath was not a conceited man, but he did not at this moment doubt Charmian's love for him. Though he was sometimes child-like, and could be, like most men, very blind, he had a keen intellect which could reason about psychology. He knew how women love success. He knew how, in a moment of excitement such as that at the end of the opera, when Jacques Sennier came before the curtain, they instinctively concentrate on the man who has made the success. He knew, or divined, what woman's concentration is. And he realized the bigness of the tribute paid to him by Charmian's abrupt detachment from the hour and the man, by the sweep of her brain and her heart to him. Any conqueror of women might have been proud of such a tribute, have considered it rare. Her eyes, her voice, in the tempest they had thrilled him. He had been only thinking of Sennier's music and of Sennier, of art and the human being behind it. Nothing within him had consciously called to Charmian. Nor had there—he felt sure now—been the unconscious call sent out

by the man of talent who feels himself left out in the cold, who cannot stifle the greedy voice of the jealousy which he despises. No, the initiative had been wholly hers. And something irresistible must have moved her, driven her, to do what she had done. She must have been mastered by an impulse bred out of strong excitement. She had been mastered by an impulse.

"All this ought to be for you. Some day it will be for you."

She had only whispered the words, but they had seemed to stab him, with so much mental force had she sent them out. Mrs. Mansfield had not heard them. And how extraordinary Charmian's eyes had been during that moment when she and he had gazed at one another. He had not known eyes could look like that, as if the whole spirit of a human being were crouching in them, intent. How far away from the eyes the human spirit must often be!

As Heath thought of Charmian's eyes he felt as if he knew very little of real life yet.

She had turned away. Again and again Jacques Sennier had been called. He had returned with Annie Meredith, to whom he had made the gift of a splendid rôle. They shook hands before the audience, not perfunctorily, but as if they loved one another, were bound together, comrades in the beautiful. He—Heath—had stood upright again, had gone on applauding with the rest. But his thoughts had then all been on himself. "If all this were for me! If I should ever have such an hour in my life, such a tribute as this! If within me is the capacity to conquer all these diverse natures and temperaments, to weld them together in a common desire, the desire to show thankfulness for what a man has been able to give them!" And he had thrilled for the first time with a fierce new longing, the longing for the best that is meant by fame.

This longing persisted now.

Heath had left Mrs. Mansfield and Charmian under the arcade of the Opera House, after putting them into their car. The crush coming out had been great. They had had to wait for nearly half an hour in the vestibule. During

that time the Mansfields had talked to many friends. Charmian had completely regained her composure. She had introduced Heath to several people, among others to Kit and Margot Drake, who spoke of nothing but the opera and its composer and Annie Meredith. The vestibule was full of the voices of praise. Everybody seemed unusually excited. Paul Lane had actually come up to them with beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, and his eyes shining with excitement.

"This is a red-letter night in my life," he had said. "I have felt a strong and genuine emotion. There's a future for music, after all, and a big one. If only there were one or two more Jacques Senniers!"

Even then Charmian had not looked again at Heath. She had answered lightly.

"Perhaps there are. Who knows? Even Monsieur Sennier was practically unknown four hours ago."

"There are not many parts of the civilized world in which his name will be unknown in four days from now," said Paul Lane, "or even in twenty-four hours. I'm going to meet him and his wife at supper at Adelaide Shiffney's, so I must say good-night—oh, and good-night, Mr. Heath."

Oh—and good-night, Mr. Heath.

Claude had walked all the way home alone slowly. He had passed through Piccadilly Circus, through Regent Street, through Oxford Street, along the north side of the closed and deserted Park on which the faint moonlight lay. When he reached his door he had not gone in. He had turned, had paced up and down. The sight of a very large policeman looking attentive, then grimly inquiring, then crudely suspicious, had finally decided him to enter his house.

What was life going to do to him if he did not hold back, did not persist any longer in his mania for refusal? There was a new world spread out before him. He stood upon its border. He wanted to step into it. But something within him, something that seemed obscure, hesitated, was perhaps afraid. In his restless mood, in his strong excitement, he wanted to crush that thing down, to stifle its voice. Caution seemed to him almost effeminate just then. He remembered how one day Charmian had said to him, after an argument

about psychology: "Really, Mr. Heath, whatever you may say, your strongest instinct is a selfish one, the instinct of self-preservation."

What was Jacques Sennier's strongest instinct?

Madame Sennier had made a powerful impression on Heath, and he had been greatly flattered by the deep attention with which she had listened to what he had to say about her husband's opera.

"Here's a man who knows what he is talking about," she exclaimed, when he finished speaking. When he got up to leave the box she had looked full into his eyes and said: "You are going to do something, too."

Could Jacques Sennier have won his triumph alone?

Impulse was boiling up in Heath. After all that had happened that night he felt as if he could not go to bed without accomplishing some decisive action. Powers were on tiptoe within him surely ready for the giant leap.

He got up, went to the piano, went to his writing-table, fingered the manuscript paper covered with tiny notes which lay scattered upon it. But, no, it would be absurd, mad, to begin to work at such an hour. And, beside, he could not work. He could not be patient. He wanted to do something with a rush, to change his life in a moment, to take a leap forward, as Sennier had done that night, a leap from shadow into light. He wanted to grasp something, to have a new experience. All the long refusal of his life, which had not seemed to cost him very much till this moment, abruptly, revengefully attacked him in the very soul, crying: "You must pay for me! Pay! Pay!" He hated the thought of his remote and solitary life. He hated the memory of the lonely evenings passed in the study of scores, or in composition, by the lamp that shed a restricted light.

The dazzle of the Covent Garden lamps was still in his eyes. He longed, he lusted for fame.

Afterwards he said to himself: "That night I was 'out' of myself."

Charmian had spurred his nature. It tingled still. There had been something that was almost like venom in that whisper of hers, which yet surely showed her love. Perhaps

instinctively she knew that he needed venom, and that she alone could supply it.

The strangest thing of all was that she had never heard his music, knew nothing at first hand of his talent, yet believed in it with such vital force, such completeness. There was something almost great in that. She was a woman who absolutely trusted her instinct. And her instinct must have told her that in him, Claude Heath, there was some particle of greatness.

He loved her just then for that.

"Oh—and good-night, Mr. Heath."

Claude's cheeks burned as if Paul Lane had laid a whip across them.

Again, as when he first entered it that night, he looked at the big room. How had he ever been able to think it cosy, home-like? It was dreary, forbidding, the sad hermitage of one who was resolved to turn his back on life, on the true life of close human relations, of inspiring intimacies, of that intercourse which should be as bread of Heaven to the soul. It was a hateful room. Nothing great, nothing to reach the hearts of men could be conceived, brought to birth in its atmosphere. Jacques Sennier, shut in alone, could never have written his opera here. In vain to try.

With an impulse of defiant anger Claude went to the writing-table, snatched up the music sheets which lay scattered upon it, tore them across and across. There should be an end to it, an end to austere futilities which led, which could lead, to nothing. In that moment of unnatural excitement he saw all his past as a pale eccentricity. He was bitterly ashamed of it. He regretted it with his whole soul, and he resolved to have done with it.

Brushing the fragments of manuscript off on to the floor he sat quickly down at the table. Something within him was trying to think, to reason, but he would not let it. He saw Charmian's eyes, he heard her quick whisper through the applause. She knew for him, as Madame Sennier had known for her husband. Often others know us better than we know ourselves. The true wisdom is to banish the conceit of self, to trust to the instinct of love.

He took a pen, leaned over the table, wrote a letter swiftly, violently even. His pen seemed to form the words by itself. He was unconscious of guiding it. The letter was not long, only two sides of a sheet. He blotted it, thrust it into an envelope, addressed, closed, and stamped it, got up, took his hat, and went out of the studio.

In a moment he was in the deserted road. The large policeman, who had eyed him with such grave suspicion, was gone. No one was in sight. The silver of the moonlight had given place to a faint grayness, a weariness of the night falling toward the arms of dawn.

Claude walked swiftly on, turned the corner, and came into the thoroughfare which skirts Kensington Gardens and the Park. Some fifty yards away there was a letter box. He hurried toward it, driven on by defiance of that within him which would fain have held him back, by the blind instinct to trample which sometimes takes hold of a strong and emotional nature in a moment of unusual excitement.

"The great refuser! No, I'll not be that any longer."

As he drew near to the letter box he felt that till now he had been a composer. Henceforth he would be a man. He had lived for an art. Henceforth he would live for life, and would make life feel his art.

He dropped his letter into the box.

In falling out of his sight it made a faint, uneasy noise.

Claude stood there like one listening.

The grayness seemed to grow slightly more livid over the tree-tops and behind the branches. The letter did not speak again. So he thought of that tiny noise, as the speech of the dropping letter. It must have slid down against the side of the box. Now it was lying still. There was nothing more for him to do but to go home. Yet he waited before the letter box, with his eyes fixed upon the small white plaque on which was printed the time of the next delivery—eight-forty A.M.

Was it the sound, or was it the movement preceding the sound, which had worked a cold change in his heart? He felt almost stunned by what he had done, like a man who strikes and sees the result of his blow, who has not measured its force, and sees his victim measure it. Eight-forty A.M.

A step sounded. He looked, and saw in the distance the large policeman slowly advancing.

When he was again in his house he closed the front door softly, and went once more to the studio. He looked round it, examining the familiar objects: the piano, his work table, the books, the deep, well-worn, homely chairs, the rugs which Mrs. Mansfield had liked. On the floor, by his table, lay the fragments of manuscript music. How had he come to tear it, his last composition?

He went over to the window, opened a square of the glass, sat down on the window-seat, and looked out to the tiny garden. A faint smell, as of dewy earth, rose from it, fresh, delicate, and—somehow—pathetic. As Claude leaned on the window-sill this frail scent, which seemed part of the dying night, connected itself in his mind with his past life. He drew it in through his nostrils, he thought of it, and vaguely it floated about the long days and nights of his work-filled loneliness, making them sad, yet sweet. He had had an ideal and he had striven to guard it carefully. He had lived for it. To-night he had cast it out in a moment of strange excitement. Had he done wrong? Had he been false to himself?

The mere fact that he was sitting and forming such questions in his mind at such a moment proved to him that he had acted madly when he had written and posted his letter. And he was overcome by a sense of dread. He feared himself, that man who could act on a passionate impulse, brushing aside all the restraints that his reason would oppose. And he feared now almost unspeakably the result of what he had done. He had given himself to the life which till now he had always avoided. He had broken with the old life.

At eight-forty that morning his letter would be taken out of the box and would start on its journey. Before night it would have been read and probably answered. Sweat broke out on his face—a feeling of desperation seized him. He loved his complete command of his own life, complete, that is, in the human sense. He had never known how much he loved it, clung to it, till now. And he must part from it. He had invited another to join with him in the directing of his life. He had written burning words. The thought of Madame

Sennier and all she had done for her husband had winged his pen.

The delicate smell from the little garden recalled him to the center. He had been, he felt, crazily travelling along some broken edge. The earth poured forth sobriety, truth dew-laden. He had to accept the influence. No longer, in this grayness that grew, that would soon melt in rose and in gold, did the dazzle of the Covent Garden lamps blind his eyes. In this coolness of the approaching morning lust for anything was impossible to him. Fame was but a shadow when the breast of the great mother heaved under the least of her children. A bird chirped. Its little voice meant more to Claude than the tempest of applause which had carried him away in the theater.

Nature took him in the dawn and carried him back to himself. And that was terrible. For when he was himself he knew that he wished he had never written that letter of love to Charmian.

The dawn broke. The light, creeping in through the lattice, touched the fragments of music paper which lay scattered over the floor. Claude looked at them, and thought:

"If only my letter lay there instead!"

CHAPTER XIV

IT was the end of January in the following year, and Charmian and Claude Heath had been married for three months. The honeymoon was over. The new strangeness of being husband and wife had worn away a little from both of them. Life had been disorganized. Now it had to be rearranged, if possible, be made compact, successful, beautiful.

For three months Claude had done no work. Charmian and he had been to Italy for their honeymoon, and had visited, among other places, Milan, Florence, Siena, Perugia, Rome, and Naples. They had not stayed their feet at the Italian lakes. Charmian had said:

"Every banal couple who want to pump up a feeling of romance go there. Don't let us join the round-eyed, open-mouthed crowd, and be smirked at by German waiters. I couldn't bear it!"

Her horror of being included in the crowd pursued her even to the church door of St. Paul's, Knightsbridge.

Now she was secretly obsessed by one idea, one great desire. She and Claude must emerge from the crowd with all possible rapidity. The old life of obscurity must be left behind, the new life of celebrity, of fame, be entered upon. Both of them must settle down now to work, Claude to his composition, she to her campaign on his behalf. Of this latter she did not breathe a word to anyone. Her instinct told her to keep her ambition as secret as possible for the present. Later on she would emerge into the open as an English Madame Sennier. But the time for laurel crowns was not yet ripe. All the spade work had yet to be done, with discretion, abnegation, a thousand delicate precautions. She must not be a young wife in a hurry. She must be, or try to be, patient.

The little old house near St. Petersburg Place had been got rid of, and Charmian and Claude had just settled in Kensington Square.

Charmian thought of this house in Kensington Square as a compromise. Claude had wished to give up Mullion House on his marriage. Seeing the obligation to enter upon a new way of life before him he had resolved, almost with fierceness, to break away from his austere past, to destroy, so far as was possible, all associations that linked him with it. With an intensity that was honorable, he set out to make a success of his life with Charmian. To do that, he felt that he must create a great change in himself. He had become wedded to habits. Those habits must all be divorced from him. An atmosphere had enfolded him, had become as it were part of him, drowning his life in its peculiar influence. He must emerge from it. But he would never be able to emerge from it in the little old house which he loved. So he got rid of his lease, with Charmian's acquiescence.

She did not really want to live on the north side of the Park. And the neighborhood was "Bayswatery." But she guessed that Claude was not quite happy in deserting his characteristic roof-tree, and she eagerly sought for another. It was found in Kensington Square. Several interesting and even famous persons lived there. The houses were old, not large, compact. They had a "flavor" of culture, which set them apart from the new and mushroom dwellings of London, and from all flats whatsoever. They were suitable to "artistic" people. A great actress, much sought after in the social world, had lived for years in this square. A famous musician was opposite to her. A baronet, who knew how to furnish, and whose wife gave delightful small parties, was next door but three. A noted novelist had just moved there from a flat in Queen Anne's Mansions. In fact, there was a cachet on Kensington Square.

And though it was rather far out, you can go almost anywhere in ten minutes if you can afford to take a taxi-cab. Charmian and Claude had fifteen hundred a year between them. She had no doubt of their being able to take taxi-cabs on such an income. And, later on, of course Claude would make a lot of money. Jacques Sennier's opera was bringing him in thousands of pounds, and he had received great offers for future works from America, where *Le Paradis Terrestre* had just

made a furore at the Metropolitan Opera House. He and Madame Sennier were in New York now, having a more than lovely time. The generous American nation had taken them both to its heart. Charmian had read several accounts of their triumphs, artistic and social, in English newspapers. She had said to herself "Ours presently!" And with renewed and vital energy, she had devoted herself afresh to the task of "getting into" the new house.

Mrs. Mansfield had helped her, with sober love and devotion.

Now at last the house was ready, four servants were engaged, and the ceremony of hanging the *crêmaillère* was being duly accomplished.

The Heaths' house-warming had brought together Charmian's friends. Heath, true to his secret determination to break away from his old life, had wished that it should be so. His few intimates in London were not in the Mansfields' set, and would not "mix in" very well with Kit and Margot Drake, the Elliots, the Burningtons, Paul Lane, and the many other people with whom Charmian was intimate; who went where she had always been accustomed to go, and who spoke her language. So it was Charmian's party and Heath played the part of host to about fifty people, most of whom were almost, or quite, strangers to him.

And he played it well, though perhaps with a certain anxiety which he could not quite conceal. For he was in a new country with people to all of whom it was old.

Late in the evening he at last had a few minutes alone with his mother-in-law. The relief to him was great. As he sat with her on a sofa in the second of the two small drawing-rooms under a replica of the Winged Victory, and a tiny full-length portrait of Charmian as a child in a white frock, standing against a pale blue background, by Burne-Jones, he felt like a man who had been far away from himself, and who was suddenly again with himself. Mrs. Mansfield's quiet tenderness flowed over him, but unostentatiously. She had much to conceal from Claude now; her understanding of the struggle, the fear, the almost desperate determination within him, her deep sympathy with him in his honorable conduct, her anxiety

about his future with her child, her painful comprehension of Charmian, which did not abate her love for the girl, but perhaps strengthened it, giving it wings of pity. She was one of those middle-aged people of great intelligence, who have learned through deep experience, to divine. Her power had not failed her during the period of her daughter's engagement to Heath. If she had not acted strongly it was because she was supremely delicate in mind, and had a great respect for personal liberty. She disliked intensely those elderly people who are constantly trying to interfere with the happiness of youth. Perhaps she was overscrupulous in her reserve. Perhaps she should have acted on the prompting of her quick understanding. She did not. It seemed to her that she could not.

She could not tell her child that Claude Heath was not really in love. Nor could she tell Charmian that an affection threaded through and through with a personal, and rather vulgar, ambition is not the kind of affection likely to form a firm basis for the building of happiness.

So she had to hide her understanding, her regret, her anxiety. She alone knew whether pride helped her, perhaps had helped to prompt her, to reticence, to concealment. She had been Claude Heath's great friend. The jealousies of women are strong. She knew herself free from jealousy. But another woman, even her own daughter, might misunderstand. It was bitter to think so, but she did think so. And her lips were sealed. Beneath the more human fears in her crouched a fear that seemed apart, almost curiously isolated and very definite, the fear for Claude Heath's strange talent.

On the night of the house-warming, as they sat together hearing the laughter, the buzz of talk, from those near them; as, a moment later, they heard those sounds diminish upon the narrow staircase, when everybody but themselves trooped down gaily to "play with a little food unceremoniously," as Charmian expressed it, Mrs. Mansfield found herself thinking of her first visit to the big studio in Mullion House, and of those Kings of the East whom the man beside her had made to live in her warm imagination.

"What is it?" Claude said, when the human sounds in the house came up from under their feet.

"From to-morrow!" she answered, looking at him with her strong, intense eyes.

"From to-morrow—yes, Madre?"

She put her thin and firm hand on his.

"Life begins again, the life of work put off for a time. To-morrow you take it up once more."

"Yes—yes!"

He glanced about the pretty room, listened to the noise of the gaieties below them. Distinctly he heard Max Elliot's genial laugh.

"Of course," he said. "I must start again on something. The question is, what on?"

"Surely you have something in hand?"

"I had. But—well, I've left it for so long that I don't know whether I could get back into the mood which enabled me to start it. I don't believe I could somehow. I think it would be best to begin on something quite fresh."

"You know that. Do you think you will like the new workroom?"

"Charmian has made it very pretty and cozy," he answered.

His imaginative eyes looked suddenly distressed, almost persecuted, and he raised his eyebrows.

"She is very clever at creating prettiness around her," he continued, after an instant of silence, during which Mrs. Mansfield looked down. "It is quite wonderful. And how energetic she is!"

"Yes, Charmian can be very energetic when she likes. Adelaide Shiffney never turned up to-night."

"She telegraphed this morning that she had to go over unexpectedly to Paris. Something to do with the Senniers probably. You know how devoted she is to him. And now he is the rage in America, Charmian says. Every day I expect to hear that Mrs. Shiffney had sailed for New York."

He laughed, but not quite naturally.

"What a change in his life that evening at Covent Garden made!" he added.

"And what a change in yours!" was Mrs. Mansfield's thought.

"He found himself, as people call it, on that night, I sup-

pose," she said. "He is one of those men with a talent made for the great public. And he knew it, perhaps, for the first time that night. He is launched now on his destined career."

"You believe in destiny?"

She detected the sadness she had surprised in his eyes in his voice now.

"Perhaps in our making of it."

"Rather than in some great Power's imposing of it upon us?"

"Ah, it's so difficult to know! When I was a child we had a game we loved. We went into a large room which was pitch dark. A person was hidden in it who had a shilling. Whichever child found that person had the shilling. There were terror and triumph in that game. It was scarcely like a game, it roused our feelings so strongly."

"It is not everyone's destiny to find the holder of the shilling," said Claude.

For a moment their eyes met. Claude suddenly reddened.

"Have I? Does she suspect? Does she know?" went through his mind. And even Mrs. Mansfield felt embarrassed. For in that moment it was as if they had spoken to each other with a terrible frankness despite the silence of their lips.

"Shan't we go down?" said Claude. "Surely you want something to eat, Madre?"

"No, really. And I like a quiet talk with my new son."

He said nothing, but she saw the strong affection in his face, lighting it, and she knew Claude loved her almost as a son may love a perfect mother. She wished that she dared to trust that love completely. But the instinctive reserve of the highly civilized held her back. And she only said:

"You must not let marriage interfere too much with your work, Claude. I care very much for that. For years your work was everything to you. It can't be that, it oughtn't to be that now. But I want your marriage with Charmian to help, not to hinder you. Be true to your own instinct in your art and surely all must go well."

"Yes, yes. To-morrow I must make a fresh start. I could never be an idler. I must—I must try to use life as food for my art!"

He was speaking out his thought of the night when he wrote his letter to Charmian. But how cold, how doubtful it seemed when clothed in words.

"Some can do that," said Mrs. Mansfield. "But, as I remember saying on the night of Charmian's return from Algiers, Swinburne's food was Putney. There is no rule. Follow your instinct."

She spoke with a sort of strong pressure. And again their eyes met.

"How well she understands me!" he thought. "Does she understand me too well?"

He became hot, then cold, at the thought that perhaps she had divined his lack of love for her daughter.

For marriage with Charmian, and three months of intimate intercourse with her, had not made Claude love her. He admired her appearance. He felt, sometimes strongly, her physical attraction. Her slim charm did not leave him unmoved. Often he felt obliged to respect her energy, her vitality. But anything that is not love is far away from love. In marrying Charmian, Claude had made a secret sacrifice on the altar of honor. He had done "the decent thing." Impulse had driven him into a mistake and he had "paid for it" like a man without a word of complaint to anyone. He had hoped earnestly, almost angrily, that love would be suddenly born out of marriage, that thus his mistake would be cancelled, his right dealing rewarded beautifully.

It had not been so. So he walked in the vast solitude of secrecy. He had become a fine humbug, he who by nature was rather drastically sincere. And he knew not how to face the future with hope, seeing no outlet from the cage into which he had walked. To-night, as Mrs. Mansfield spoke, with that peculiar firm pressure, he thought: "Perhaps I shall find salvation in work." If she had divined the secret he could never tell her perhaps she had seen the only way out. The true worker, the worker who is great, uses the troubles, the sorrows, even the great tragedies of life as material, combines them in a whole that is precious, lays them as balm, or as bitter tonic on the wounds of the world. And so all things in his life work together for good.

"May it be so with me!" was Claude's silent prayer that night.

When their guests were gone, Charmian sat down on a very low chair before the wood fire—she insisted on wood instead of coal—in the first drawing-room.

"Don't let us go to bed for a few minutes yet, Claude," she said. "You aren't sleepy, are you?"

"Not a bit."

He sat down on the chintz-covered sofa near her.

"It went off well, didn't it?"

She was looking into the fire. Her narrow, long-fingered hands were clasped round her knees. She wore a pale yellow dress, and there was a yellow band in her dark hair, which was arranged in such a way that it looked, Claude thought, like a careless cloud, and which gave to her face a sort of picturesquely tragic appearance.

"Yes, I think it did."

"They all liked you."

"I'm glad!"

"You make an excellent host, Claudie; you are so ready, so sympathetic! You listen so well, and look as if you really cared, whether you do or not. It's such a help to a man in his career to have a manner like yours. But I remember noticing it the first time I ever met you in Max Elliot's music-room. What a shame of Adelaide Shiffney not to come!"

Her voice had suddenly changed.

"Did you want Mrs. Shiffney to come so particularly?" Claude asked, not without surprise.

"Yes, I did. Not for myself, of course. I don't pretend to be fond of her, though I don't dislike her! But she ought to have come after accepting. People thought she was coming to-night. I wonder why she rushed off to Paris like that?"

"I should think it was probably something to do with the Senniers. Max Elliot told me just now that she lives and breathes Sennier."

Claude spoke with a quiet humor, and quite without anger.

"Max does exactly the same," said Charmian. "It really becomes rather silly—in a man."

"But Sennier is worth it. Nothing spurious about him."

"I never said there was. But still—Margot is rather tiresome, too, with her rages first for this person and then for the other."

"Who is it now?"

"Oh, she's Sennier-mad like the others."

"Still?"

"Yes, after all these months. She's actually going over to America, I believe, just to hear the *Paradis* once at the Metropolitan. Five days out, five back, and one night there. Isn't it absurd? She's had it put in the *Daily Mail*. And then she says she can't think how things about her get into the papers! Margot really is rather a humbug!"

"Still, she admires the right thing when she admires Sennier's talent," said Claude, with a sort of still decision.

Charmian turned her eyes away from the fire and looked at him.

"How odd you are!" she said, after a little pause.

"Why? In what way am I odd?"

"In almost every way, I think. But it's all right. You ought to be odd."

"What do you mean, Charmian?"

"Jacques Sennier's odd, extraordinary. People like that always are. You are."

She was examining him contemplatively, as a woman examines a possession, something that the other women have not. Her look made him feel very restive and intensely reserved.

"I doubt if I am the least like Jacques Sennier," he said.

"Oh, yes, you are. I know."

His rather thin and very mobile lips tightened, as if to keep back a rush of words.

"You don't know yourself," Charmian continued, still looking at him with those contemplative and possessive eyes. "Men don't notice what is part of themselves."

"Do women?"

"What does it matter? I am thinking about you, about my man."

There was a long pause, which Claude filled by getting up and lighting a cigarette. A hideous, undressed sensation

possessed him, the undressed sensation of the reserved nature that is being stared at. He said to himself: "It is natural that she should look at me like this, speak to me like this. It is perfectly natural." But he hated it. He even felt as if he could not endure it much longer, and would be obliged to do something to stop it.

"Don't sit down again," said Charmian, as he turned with the cigarette in his mouth.

She got up with lithe ease, like one uncurling.

"Let's go and look at your room, where you're going to begin work to-morrow."

She put her hand on his arm. And her hand was possessive as her eyes had been.

Claude's workroom was at the back of the house on the floor above the drawing-room. An upright piano replaced the grand piano of Mullion House, now dedicated to the drawing-room. There was a large flat writing-table in front of the window, where curtains of Irish frieze, dark green in color, hung shutting out the night and the ugliness at the back of Kensington Square. The walls were nearly covered with books. At the bottom of the bookcases were large drawers for music. A Canterbury held more music, and was placed beside the writing-table. The carpet was dark green without any pattern. In the fireplace were some curious Morris tiles, representing Æneas carrying Anchises, with Troy burning in the background. There were two armchairs, and a deep sofa covered in dark green. A photograph of Charmian stood on the writing-table. It showed her in evening dress, holding her Conder fan, and looking out with half-shut eyes. There was in it a hint of the assumed dreaminess which very sharp-witted modern maidens think decorative in photographs, the "I follow an ideal" expression, which makes men say, "What a charming girl! Looks as if she'd got something in her, too!"

"It's a dear little room, isn't it, Claude?" said Charmian.

"Yes, very."

"You really like it, don't you? You like its atmosphere?"

"I think you've done it delightfully. I was saying to

Madre only this evening how extraordinarily clever you are in creating prettiness around you."

"Were you? How nice of you."

She laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"You'll be able to work here?"

"Why not?"

"Let's shut the door, and just *feel* the room for a minute."

"All right."

He shut the door.

"Don't let us speak for a moment," she whispered.

She was sitting now on the deep sofa just beyond the writing-table. Claude stood quite still. And in the silence which followed her words he strove to realize whether he would be able to work in the little room. Would anything come to him here? His eyes rested on Anchises, crouched on the back of his son, on the burning city of Troy. He felt confused, strange, and then *dépaysé*. That word alone meant what he felt just then. Ah, the little house with the one big room looking out on to the scrap of garden, yellow-haired Fan, Harriet discreet unto dumbness, Mrs. Searle with her scraps of wisdom—he with his freedom!

The room was a cage, wire bars everywhere. Never could he work in it!

"It is good for work, isn't it, Claudie? Even poor little I can feel that. What wonderful things you are going to do here. As wonderful as—" She checked herself abruptly.

"As what?" he asked, striving to force an interest, to banish his secret desperation.

"I won't tell you now. Some day—in a year, two years—I'll tell you."

Her eyes shone. He thought they looked almost greedy.

"When my man's done something wonderful!"

CHAPTER XV

IN Charmian's conception of the perfect helpmate for a great man self-sacrifice shone out as the first of the virtues. She must sacrifice herself to Claude, must regulate her life so that his might glide smoothly, without any friction, to the appointed goal. She must be patient, understanding, and unselfish. But she must also be firm at the right moment, be strong in judgment, be judicious, the perfect critic as well as the ardent admirer. During her life among clever and well-known men she had noticed how the mere fact of marriage often seems to make a man think highly of the intellect of his chosen woman. Again and again she had heard some distinguished writer or politician, wedded to somebody either quite ordinary, or even actually stupid, say: "I'd take my wife's judgment before anyone's," or "My wife sees more clearly for a man than anyone I know." She had known painters and sculptors submit their works to the criticism of women totally ignorant in the arts, simply because those women had had the faultless taste to marry them. If such women exercised so strong an influence over their men, what should hers be over Claude? For she had been well educated, was trained in music, had always moved in intellectual and artistic sets, and was certainly not stupid. Indeed, now that the main stream of her life was divided from her mother's, she often felt as if she were decidedly clever. Susan Fleet, long ago, had roused up her will. Since that day she had never let it sleep. And her success in marrying Claude had made her rely on her will, rely on herself. She was a girl who could "carry things through," a girl who could make of life a success. As a young married woman she showed more of assurance than she had showed as an unmarried girl. There was more of decision in her expression and her way of being. She was resolved to impress the world, of course for her husband's sake.

Life in the house in Kensington had to be arranged for

Claude with every elaborate precaution. That must be the first move in the campaign secretly planned out by Charmian, and now about to be carried through.

On the morning after the house-warming, when a late breakfast was finished, but while they were still at the breakfast-table in the long and narrow dining-room, which looked out on the quiet square, Charmian said to her husband:

"I've been speaking to the servants, Claude. I've told them about being very quiet to-day."

He pushed his tea-cup a little away from him.

"Why?" he asked. "I mean why specially to-day?"

"Because of your composing. Alice is a good girl, but she is a little inclined to be noisy sometimes. I've spoken to her seriously about it."

Alice was the parlor-maid. Charmian would have preferred to have a man to answer the door, but she had sacrificed to economy, or thought she had done so, by engaging a woman. As Claude said nothing, Charmian continued:

"And another thing! I've told them all that you're never to be disturbed when you're in your own room, that they're never to come to you with notes, or the post, never to call you to the telephone. I want you to feel that once you are inside your own room you are absolutely safe, that it is sacred ground."

"Thank you, Charmian."

He pushed his cup farther away, with a movement that was rather brusque, and got up.

"What about lunch to-day? Do you eat lunch when you are composing? Do you want something sent up to you?"

"Well, I don't know. I don't think I shall want any lunch to-day. You see we've breakfasted late. Don't bother about me."

"It isn't a bother. You know that, Claudie. But would you like a cup of coffee, tea, anything at one o'clock?"

"Oh, I scarcely know. I'll ring if I do."

He made a movement. Charmian got up.

"I do long to know what you are going to work on," she said, in a changed, almost mysterious, voice, which was not consciously assumed.

She came up to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Ever since I first heard your music—you remember, two days after we were engaged—I've longed to be able to do a little something to help you on. You know what I mean. In the woman's way, by acting as a sort of buffer between you and all the small irritations of life. We who can't create can sometimes be of use to those who can. We can keep others from disturbing the mystery. Let me do that. And, in return, let me be in the secret, won't you?"

Claude stood rather stiffly under her hands.

"You are kind, good. But—but don't make any bother about me in the house. I'd rather you didn't. Let everything just go on naturally. I don't want to be a nuisance."

"You couldn't be. And you will let me?"

"Perhaps—when I know it myself."

He made a little rather constrained laugh.

"One's got to think, try. One doesn't always know directly what one wishes to do, can do."

"No, of course not."

She took away her hands gently.

"Now I don't exist till you want me to again."

Claude went up to the little room at the back of the house. At this moment he would gladly, thankfully, have gone anywhere else. But he felt that he was expected to go there. Five women, his wife and the four maids, expected him to go there. So he went. He shut himself in, and remained there, caged.

It was a still and foggy day of frost. In the air, even within the house, there was a feeling of snow, light, thin, and penetrating. London seemed peculiarly silent. And the silence seemed to have something to do with the fog, the frost, and the coming snow. When the door of his room was shut Claude stood by his table, then before the fire, feeling curiously empty headed, almost light headed. He stared at the fire, listened to its faint crackling, and felt as if his life were a hollow shell.

Probably he had stood thus for a considerable time—he did not know whether for five minutes or an hour—when he was made self-conscious by an event in the house. He heard

two women's voices in conversation, apparently on the staircase.

One of them said:

"The duster, I tell you!"

The other replied:

"Well, I didn't leave it. Ask Fanny, can't you!"

"Fanny doesn't know."

"She ought to know, then!"

"Ought yourself! Fanny's no business with the duster no more than—"

At this point a third voice intervened in the dialogue. It was Charmian's, reduced to a sort of intense whisper. It said:

"Alice! Alice! I specially told you not to make a sound in the house. Your master is at work. The least noise disturbs him. Pray be quiet. If you must speak, go downstairs."

There was silence, then the sound of rustling, of a door shutting, then again silence.

Claude came away from the fire.

"Your master is at work."

He dashed down his hands on the big writing-table, with a gesture almost of despair. Self-consciousness now was like an iron band about him, the devilish thing that constricts a talent. The hideous knowledge that he was surrounded by women, intent on him and what he was supposed to be doing, benumbed his intellect. He imagined the cook in the kitchen discussing his talent with a rolling-pin in her hand, Charmian's maid musing over his oddities, with a mouth full of pins, and patterns on her lap. And he ground his teeth.

"I can't—I can't—I never shall be able to!"

He leaned his elbows on the writing-table and put his head in his hands. When he looked up, after some minutes, he met Charmian's half-closed, photographed eyes.

Between twelve and one o'clock the noise of a piano organ playing vigorously, almost angrily, "You are Queen of my heart to-night," came up to him from the square, softened, yet scarcely ameliorated, by distance and intervening walls. With bold impertinence it began, continued for perhaps three minutes, then abruptly ceased in the middle of a phrase.

Claude knew why. One of the four maids, incited thereto by Charmian, had rushed out to control the swarthy Italian who was earning his living in the land without light.

The master was working.

But the master was not working.

Day followed day, and Claude kept his secret, the secret that he was doing, could do, nothing in the room arranged by Charmian, in the atmosphere created by Charmian.

One thing specially troubled him.

So long as he had lived alone he had never felt as if his art, or perhaps rather his method of giving himself to it, had any trait of effeminacy. It had seemed quite natural to him to be shut up in his own "diggings," isolated, with only a couple of devoted servants, and golden-haired Fan in the distance, being as natural as he was. It had never occurred to him that his life was specially odd.

But now he often did feel as if there were something effeminate in the young composer at home, perpetually in the house, with his wife and a lot of women. The smallness of the house, of his workroon, emphasized this feeling. Although an almost dreadful silence was preserved whenever he was supposed to be working his very soul seemed to hear the perpetual rustle of skirts. The fact that five women were keeping quiet on his account made him feel as if he were an effeminate fool, feel that if his art was a thing unworthy of a man's devotion, that in following it, in sacrificing to it, he was doing himself harm, was undermining his own masculinity.

This sensation grew in him. He envied the men whose work took them from home. He longed, after breakfast, to put on hat and coat and sally out. He thought of the text, "Man goeth forth to his work and to his labor until the evening." If only he could go forth! If only he could forget the existence of his intent wife, of those four hushed and wondering maids every day for six or eight hours. He fell into deep despondencies, sometimes into silent rages which seemed to eat into his heart.

During this time Charmian was beginning to "put out feelers." Her work for Claude, that is, her work outside the little house in Kensington Square, was to be social. Women

can do very much in the social way. And she knew herself well equipped for the task in hand. Her heart was in it, too. She felt sure of that. Even to herself she never used the words "worldly ambition." The task was a noble one, to make the career of the man she believed in and loved glorious, to bring him to renown. While he was shut up, working in the little room she had made so cozy, so "atmospheric," she would be at work for him in the world they were destined to conquer.

All the "set" had come to call in Kensington Square. Most of them were surprised at the match. They recognized the wordly instinct in Charmian, which many of them shared, and could not quite understand why she had chosen Claude Heath as her husband. They had not heard much of him. He never went anywhere, was personally unknown to them. It seemed rather odd. They had scarcely thought Charmian Mansfield would make that kind of marriage. Of course he was a thorough gentleman, and a man with pleasant, even swiftly attractive manners. But still—! The general verdict was that Charmian must have fallen violently in love with the man.

She felt the feelings of the "set." And she felt that she must justify her choice as soon as possible. To the set Claude Heath was simply a nobody. Charmian meant to turn him into a somebody.

This turning of Claude into a somebody was to be the first really important step in her campaign on his behalf. It must be done subtly, delicately, but it must be done swiftly. She was secretly impatient to justify her choice.

She had at first relied on Max Elliot to help her. He was an enthusiastic man and had influence. Unluckily she soon found that for the moment he was so busy adoring Jacques Sennier that he had no time to beat the big drum for another. Sennier had carried him off his feet, and Madame Sennier had "got hold of him." The last phrase was Charmian's. It was speedily evident to her that, womanlike, the Frenchwoman was not satisfied with the fact of her husband's immense success. She was determined that no rival should spring up to divide adorers into camps. No doubt she argued

that there is in the musical world only a limited number of discriminating enthusiasts, capable of forming and fostering public opinion, of "giving a lead" to the critics, and through them to the world. She wanted them all for her husband. And their allegiance must be undivided. Although she was in New York, she had Max Elliot "in her pocket" in London. It was a feat which won Charmian's respect, but which irritated her extremely. Max Elliot was charming, of course, when she spoke of her husband's talent. But she saw at once that he was concentrated on Sennier. She felt at once that he did not at the moment want to "go mad" over any other composer. If Claude had been a singer, a pianist, or a fiddler, things would have been different. Max Elliot had taken charge of the Frenchman's financial affairs, solely out of friendship, and was investing the American and other gains in various admirable enterprises. Madame Sennier, who really was, as Paul Lane had said, an extraordinary woman, had a keen eye to the main chance. She acted as a sort of agent to her husband, and was reported on all hands to be capable of driving a very hard bargain. She and Max Elliot were perpetually cabling to each other across the Atlantic, and Max was seriously thinking of imitating Margot Drake and "running over" to New York on the *Lusitania*. Only his business in London detained him. He spoke of Sennier invariably as "Jacques," of Madame Sennier as "Henriette." Living English composers scarcely existed any more in his sight. France was the country of music. Only from France could one expect anything of real value to the truly cultured.

Charmian began to hate this absurd entente cordiale.

Another person on whom she had secretly set high hopes was Adelaide Shiffney. It was for this reason that she had been irritated at Mrs. Shiffney's defection on the night of the house-warming. Now that she was married to a composer Charmian understood the full value of Mrs. Shiffney's influence in the fashionable world. She must get Adelaide on their side. But here again Sennier stood in her path. Mrs. Shiffney was, musically speaking of course, in love with Jacques Sennier. Since Wagner there had been nobody to play upon feminine

nerves as the little Frenchman played, to take women "out of themselves." As a well-known society woman said, with almost pathetic frankness, "When one hears Sennier's music one wants to hold hands with somebody." Apparently Mrs. Shiffney wanted to hold hands with the composer himself. She had "no use" at the moment for anyone else, and had already arranged to take the Senniers on a yachting cruise after the London season, beginning with Cowes.

The "feelers" which Charmian put out found the atmosphere rather chilly.

But she remembered what battles with the world most of its great men have had to fight, how many wives of great men have had to keep the flame alive in gross darkness. She was not daunted. But she presently began to feel that, without being frank with Claude, she must try to get a certain amount of active help from him. She had intended by judicious talk to create the impression that Claude was an extraordinary man, on the way to accomplish great things. She believed this thoroughly herself. But she now realized that, owing to the absurd Sennier "boom," unless she could get Claude to show publicly something of his talent nobody would pay any attention to what she said.

"What is he doing?" people asked, when she spoke about his long hours of work, about the precautions she had to take lest he should be disturbed. She answered evasively. The truth was that she did not know what Claude was doing. What he had done, or some of it, she did know. She had heard his Te Deum, and some of his strange settings of words from the scriptures. But her clever worldly instinct told her that this was not the time when her set would be likely to appreciate things of that kind. The whole trend of the taste she cared about was setting in the direction of opera. And whenever she tried to find out from Claude what he was composing in Kensington Square she was met with evasive answers.

One afternoon she came home from a party at the Drakes' house in Park Lane determined to enlist Claude's aid at once in her enterprise, without telling him what was in her heart. And first she must find out definitely what sort of composition

he was working on at the present moment. In Park Lane nothing had been heard of but Sennier and Madame Sennier. Margot had returned from America more enthusiastic, more *engouée* than ever.

She had been as straw to the flame of American enthusiasm. All her individuality seemed to have been burnt out of her. She was at present only a sort of receptacle for Sennier-mania. In dress, hair, manner, and even gesture, she strove to reproduce Madame Sennier. For one of the most curious features of Sennier's vogue was the worship accorded by women as well as by men to his dominating wife. They talked and thought almost as much about her as they did about him. And though his was the might of genius, hers seemed to be the might of personality. The perpetual chanting of the Frenchwoman's praises had "got upon" Charmian's nerves. She felt this afternoon as if she could not bear it much longer, unless some outlet was provided for her secret desires. And she arrived at Kensington Square in a condition of suppressed nervous excitement.

She paid the driver of the taxi-cab and rang the bell. She had forgotten to take her key. Alice answered the door.

"Is Mr. Heath in?" asked Charmian.

"He's been playing golf, ma'am. But he's just come in," answered Alice, a plump, soft-looking girl, with rather sulky blue eyes.

"Oh, of course! It's Saturday."

On Saturday Claude generally took a half-holiday, and went down to Richmond to play golf with a friend of his who lived there, an old Cornish chum called Tregorwan.

"Where is Mr. Heath?" continued Charmian, standing in the little hall.

"Having his tea in the drawing-room, ma'am."

"Oh!"

She took off her fur coat and went quickly upstairs. She did not care about golf, and to-day the mere sound of the name irritated her. Englishmen were always playing golf, she said to herself. Jacques Sennier did not waste his time on such things, she was sure. Then she remembered for how many hours every day Claude was shut up in his little room,

how he always went there immediately after breakfast. And she realized the injustice of her dawning anger, and also her nervous state, and resolved to be very gentle and calm with Claude.

It was a cold day at the end of March. She found him sitting near the wood fire in knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket, with thick, heavily nailed boots, covered with dried mud, on his feet, and thick brown and red stockings on his legs. It was almost impossible to believe he was a musician. His hair had been freshly cut, but he had not "watered" it. Since his marriage Charmian had never allowed him to do that. He jumped up when he saw his wife. Intimacy never made Claude relax in courtesy.

"I'm having tea very late," he said. "But I've only just got in."

"I know. Sit down and go on, dear old boy. I'll come and sit with you. Don't you want more light?"

"I like the firelight."

He sat down again and lifted the teapot.

"I shall spoil my dinner. But never mind."

"You remember we're dining with Madre!"

"Oh—to be sure!"

"But not till half-past eight."

She sat down with her back to the drawn window curtains at right angles to Claude. Alice had "shut up" early to make the drawing-room look cozy for Claude. The firelight played about the room, illuminating now one thing, now another, making Claude's face and head, sometimes his musical hands look Rembrandtesque, powerful, imaginative, even mysterious. Now that Charmian had sat down she lost her impression of the eternal golfer, received another impression which spurred her imagination.

"I've been at the Drakes," she began. "Only a very few to welcome Margot back from New York."

"Did she enjoy her visit?"

"Immensely. She's—as she calls it—tickled to death with the Americans in their own country. She meant to stay only one night, but she was there three weeks. It seems all New York has gone mad over Jacques Sennier."

"I'm glad they see how really fine his opera is," Claude said, seriously, even earnestly.

"Margot says when the Americans like anything they are the most enthusiastic nation in the world."

"If it is so it's a fine trait in the national character, I think."

How impersonal he sounded. She longed for the creeping music of jealousy in his voice. If only Claude would be jealous of Sennier!

She spoke lightly of other things, and presently said:

"How is the work getting on?"

There was a slight pause. Then Claude said:

"The work?"

"Yes, yours."

She hesitated. There was something in her husband's personality that sometimes lay upon her like an embargo. She was conscious of this embargo now. But her nervous irritation made her determined to defy it.

"Claudie," she went on, "you don't know, you can't know, how much I care for your work. It's part of you. It is you. You promised me once you would let me be in the secret. Don't you remember?"

"Did I? When?"

"The day after our party when you were going to begin work again. And now it's nearly two months."

She stopped. He was silent. A flame burst out of a log in the grate and lit up strongly one half of his face. She thought it looked stern, almost fierce, and very foreign. Many Cornish people have Spanish blood in them, she remembered. That foreign look made her feel for a moment almost as if she were sitting with a stranger.

"Nearly two months," she repeated in a more tentative voice.

"Is it?"

"Yes. Don't you think I've been very patient?"

"But, surely—surely—why should you want to know?"

"I do want. Your work is your life. I want it to be mine, too."

"Oh, it could never be that—the work of another."

"I want to identify myself with you."

There was another silence. And this time it was a long one. At last Claude moved, turned round to face Charmian fully, and said, with the voice of one making a strong, almost a desperate effort:

"You wish to know what I've been working on during these weeks when I've been in my room?"

"Yes."

"I haven't been working on anything."

"What?"

"I haven't been working at all."

"Not working!"

"No."

"But—you must—but we were all so quiet! I told Alice—"

"I never asked you to."

"No, but of course—but what have you been doing up there?"

"Reading Carlyle's *French Revolution* most of the time."

"Carlyle! You've been reading Carlyle!"

In her voice there was a sound of outrage. Claude got up and stood by the fire.

"It isn't my fault," he said. "The truth is I can't work in that room. I can't work in this house."

"But it's our home."

"I know, but I can't work in it. Perhaps it's because of the maids, knowing they're creeping about, wondering—I don't know what it is. I've tried, but I can't do anything."

"But—how dreadful! Nearly two months wasted!"

He felt that she was condemning him, and a secret anger surged through him. His reserve, too, was suffering torment.

"I'm sorry, Charmian. But I couldn't help it."

"But then, why did you go up and shut yourself in day after day?"

"I hoped to be able to do something."

"But——"

"And I saw you expected me to go."

The truth was out. Claude felt, as he spoke it, as if he were tearing off clothes. How he loathed that weakness of

his, which manifested itself in the sometimes almost uncontrollable instinct to give, or to try to give, others what they expected of him.

"Expected you! But naturally—"

"Yes, I know. Well, that's how it is! I can't work in this house."

He spoke almost roughly now.

"I don't want to assume any absurd artistic pose," he continued. "I hate the affectations sometimes supposed to belong to my profession. But it's no use pretending about a thing of this kind. There are some places, some atmospheres, if you like to use the word generally used, that help anyone who tries to create, and some that hinder. It's not only a matter of place, I suppose, but of people. This house is too small, or something. There are too many people in it. I feel that they are all bothering and wondering about me, treading softly for me." He threw out his hands. "I don't know what it is exactly, but I'm paralyzed here. I suppose you think I'm half mad."

To his great surprise, she answered, in quite a different voice from the voice which had suggested outrage:

"No, no; great artists are always like that. They are always extraordinary."

There was a mysterious pleasure, almost gratification, in her voice.

"You would be like that. I should have known."

"Oh, as to that—"

"I understand, Claudie. You needn't say any more."

Claude turned rather brusquely round to face the fire. As he said nothing, Charmian continued:

"What is to be done now? We have taken this house—"

He wheeled round.

"Of course we shall stay in this house. It suits us admirably. Besides, to move simply because—"

"Your work comes before all."

He compressed his lips. He began to hate his own talent.

"I think the best thing to do," he said, "would be for me to look for a studio somewhere. I could easily find one, put a piano and a few chairs in, and go there every day to work.

Lots of men do that sort of thing. It's like going to an office."

"Capital!" she said. "Then you'll be quite isolated, and you'll get on ever so fast. Won't you?"

"I think probably I could work."

"And you will. Before we married you worked so hard. I want"—she got up, came to him, and put her hand in his—"I want to feel that marriage has helped you, not hindered you, in your career. I want to feel that I urge you on, don't hold you back."

Claude longed to tell her to leave him alone. But he thought of coming isolation in the studio, and refrained. Bending down, he kissed her.

"It will be all right," he said, "when I've got a place where I can be quite alone for some hours each day."

CHAPTER XVI

WITH an energy that was almost feverish, Charmian threw herself into the search for a studio. The little room had been a failure, through no fault of hers. She must make a success of the studio. She and Claude set forth together, and soon bent their steps toward Chelsea. There were studios to be had in Kensington, of course. But Claude happened to mention Chelsea, and at once Charmian took up the idea. The right atmosphere—that was the object of this new quest, the end and aim of their wanderings. If it were to be found in Chelsea, then in Chelsea Claude must make his daily habitation. Charmian seconded the Chelsea proposition with an enthusiasm that was almost a little anxious. Chelsea was so picturesque, so near the river, that somber and wonderful heart of London. Such interesting and famous people lived in Chelsea now, and had lived there in the past. She wondered they had not decided to live in Chelsea instead of in Kensington. But Claude was right, unerring in his judgment. Of course the studio must be in Chelsea.

One was found not far from Glebe Place, in a large red building with an arched entrance, handsome steps, and several artistic-looking windows, with leaded panes and soda-water bottle grass. It was on the ground floor, but it was quiet, large but not enormous, and well-planned. It contained however, one unnecessary, though not unattractive, feature. At one end, on the left of the door, there was a platform reached by a flight of steps, and screened off with wood from the rest of the room. The caretaker, who had the key and showed them round, explained that this had been planned and put up by an Austrian painter, who used the chamber formed by the platform and the upper part of the screen as a bedroom, and the space below, roofed by the platform as a kitchen.

The rent was one hundred pounds a year.

This seemed too much to Claude. He felt ashamed to spend such a large sum on what must seem an unnecessary caprice to the average person, even probably to people who were above the average. If he were known as a composer, if he were popular or famous, the matter, he felt, would be quite different. Everyone understands the artistic needs of the famous man, or pretends to understand them. But Claude and his work were entirely unknown to fame. And now, as he hesitated about the payment of this hundred pounds, he regretted this, as he had never before regretted it.

But Charmian was strong in her insistence upon his having this particular studio. She saw he had taken a fancy to it.

"I know you feel there's the right atmosphere here," she said. "I can see you do. It would be fatal not to take this studio if you have that feeling. Never mind the expense. We shall get it all back in the future."

"Back in the future!" he said, as if startled. "How?"

She saw she had been imprudent, had made a sort of slip.

"Oh, I don't know. Some day when your father— But don't let's talk of that. A hundred a year is not very much. It will only mean not quite so many new hats and dresses for me."

Claude flushed, suddenly and violently.

"Charmian! You can't suppose—"

"Surely a wife has the right to do something to help her husband?"

"But I don't need—I mean, I could never consent—"

She made a face at him, drawing down her brows, and turning her eyes to the left where the caretaker stood, with a bunch of keys in his large, gouty, red hands. Claude said no more. As they went out Charmian smiled at the caretaker.

"We are going to take it. My husband likes it."

"Yes, ma'am. It's a mighty fine studio. The Baron was sorry to leave it, but he had to go back to Vi-henner."

"I see."

"Now the next thing is to furnish it," said Charmian, as they walked away.

"I shall only want my piano, a chair, and a table," said Claude.

It was only by making a very great effort that he was able to speak naturally, with any simplicity.

"Besides," he added quickly, "it's really too expensive. A hundred a year is absurd."

"If it were two hundred a year it wouldn't be a penny too much if you really like it, if you will feel happy and at home in it. I'm going to furnish it for you, quite simply, of course. Just rugs and a divan or two, and a screen to shut out the door, two or three pretty comfortable chairs, some draperies —only thin ones, nothing heavy to spoil the acoustics—a few cushions, a table or two. Oh, and you must have a spirit-lamp, a little *batterie de cuisine*, and perhaps a tea-basket."

"But, my dear Charmian—"

"Hush, old boy! You have genius, but you don't understand these things. These are the woman's things. I shall love getting together everything. Surely you don't want to spoil my little fun. I've made a failure of your workroom in Kensington. Do let me try to make a success of the studio."

What could Claude do but thank her, but let her have her way?

The studio was taken for three years and furnished. For days Charmian talked and thought of little else. She was prompted, carried on, by two desires—one, that Claude should be able to work hard as soon as possible; the other, that people should realize what an energetic, capable, and enthusiastic woman she was. The Madame Sennier spirit attended her in her goings out and her comings in, armed her with energy, with gaiety, with patience.

When at length all was ready, she said:

"Claude, to-morrow I want you to do something for me."

"What is it? Of course I will do it. You've been so good, giving up everything for the studio."

Charmian had really given up several parties, and explained why she could not go to them to inquiring hostesses of the "set."

"I want you to let us *pendre la crémaillère* to-morrow evening all alone, just you and I together."

"In the studio?"

"Of course."

"Well, but"—he smiled, then laughed rather awkwardly—"but what could we do there all alone? What is there to do? And, besides, there's that party at Mrs. Shiffney's to-morrow night. We were both going to that."

"We could go there afterward if we felt inclined. But—I don't know that I want to go to Adelaide Shiffney just now."

"But why not?"

"Perhaps—only perhaps, remember—I'll tell you to-morrow night in the studio."

She assumed in the last words that the matter was settled, and Claude raised no further objection. He saw she was set upon the carrying out of her plan. There was will in her long eyes. He could not help fancying that either she had some surprise in store for him, or that she meant to do, or say, something extremely definite, which she had already decided upon in her mind, to-morrow in the studio.

He felt slightly uneasy.

On the following morning Charmian looked distinctly mysterious, and rather as if she wished Claude to notice her mystery. He ignored it, however, though he realized that some plan must be maturing in her head. His suspicion of the day before was certainly well founded.

"What about this evening, Charmian?" he asked.

"Oh, we are going to *pendre la crémaillère*. You remember we decided yesterday."

"Before or after dinner? And what about Mrs. Shiffney?"

"Well, I thought we might go to the studio about half-past seven or eight. Could you meet me there—say at half-past seven?"

"Meet you?"

"Yes; I've got to go out in that direction and could take it on the way home."

"All right. But dinner? That's just at dinner-time—not that I care."

"We could have something when we get home. I can tell

Alice to put something in the dining-room for us. There's that pie, and we can have a bottle of champagne to drink success to the studio, if we want it."

"And Mrs. Shiffney's given up?"

"We can see how we feel. She only asked us for eleven. We can easily dress and go, it we want to."

So it was settled.

As Claude had not yet begun to work he took a long and solitary walk in the afternoon. He made his way to Battersea Park, and spent nearly two hours there. That day he felt as if a crisis, perhaps small but very definite, had arisen in his life. For some five months now he had been inactive. He had lost the long habit of work. He had allowed his life to be disorganized. No longer had he a grip on himself and on life. From to-morrow he must get that grip again. In the isolation of the studio he would surely be able to get it. Yet he felt very doubtful. He did not know what he wanted to do. He seemed to have drifted very far away from the days when his talent, or his genius, spoke with no uncertain voice, dictated to him what he must do. In those days he was seldom in doubt. He did not have to search. There was no vagueness in his life. The Bible, that inexhaustible mine of great literature, prompted him to music. But, then, he was living in comparative solitude. Quiet days stretched before him, empty evenings. He could give himself up to what was within him. Even now he could have quiet days. He had recently passed not a few with the *French Revolution*. But the evenings of course were not, could not be, empty. He often went out with Charmian. He was beginning to know something of the society in which she had always lived. There were many pleasant, some charming, people in it. He found a certain enjoyment in the little dinners, the theater parties, even in the few receptions he had been to. But he was obliged to acknowledge to himself that, when in this society, he disliked the fact that he was an unknown man. This society did not give him the incentive to do anything great. On the other hand it made him dislike being—or was it only seeming?—small. Charmian's attitude, too, had often rendered him secretly uneasy when they were among people together. He had been conscious of a lurking

dissatisfaction in her, a scarcely repressed impatience. He did not know exactly what was the matter. But he felt the alert tension of the woman who is not satisfied with her position in a society. It had reacted upon him. He had felt as if he were closely connected with it, though he had not quite understood how.

All this now rose up, seemed to spread out before his mind as he walked in Battersea Park. And he said to himself, "It can't go on. I simply must get to work on something. I must get a grip on myself and my life again." He remembered the heat of his soul after he had heard Jacques Sennier's opera, the passion almost to do something great that had glowed in him, the longing for fame. Then he had said to himself: "My life shall feed my art. I'll live, and by living I'll achieve." Out of that heat no rare flower had arisen. He had come out into the world. He had married Charmian, had travelled in Italy. And that was all.

That day he was angry with himself, was sick of his idle life. But he did not feel within him the strong certainty that he would be able to take his life in hand and transform it, which drives doubt and sorrow out of a man. He kept on saying, "I must!" But he did not say, "I shall!"

The fact was that the mainspring was missing from the watch. Claude was living as if he loved, but he was not loving.

At half-past seven he passed up the handsome steps and under the arch which led to his studio.

The caretaker with gouty hands met him. This man had been a soldier, and still had a soldier's eyes, and a way of presenting himself, rather sternly and watchfully, to those arriving in "my building," as he called the house full of studios, which was military. But gout, and it is to be feared drink, had long ago made him physically flaccid, and mentally rather sulky and vague. He looked a wreck, and as if he guessed that he was a wreck. An artist on the first floor had labelled him, "The derelict looking for tips to the offing."

"The lady's here, sir," he observed, on seeing Claude.

"Is she?"

"Been 'ere"—he sometimes dropped an aitch and sometimes did not—"this half hour."

The fact apparently surprised him, almost indeed upset him.

"This 'alf hour," he repeated, this time dropping the aitch to make a change.

"Oh," said Claude, disdaining the explanation which seemed to be expected.

He walked on, leaving the guardian to his gout.

The studio was lit up, and directly Claude opened the door he smelt coffee and something else—sausages, he fancied. At once he guessed why Charmian had arranged to meet him at the studio, instead of going there with him. He shut the door slowly. Yes, certainly, sausages.

"Charmian!" he called.

She came out from behind the screen, dressed in a very plain, workmanlike black gown, over which she was wearing a large butcher blue apron. Her sleeves were turned up and her face was flushed. Claude thought she looked younger than she usually did.

"What are you doing?"

"Cooking the dinner," she replied, in a practical voice. "It will be ready in a minute. Take off your coat and sit down."

She turned round and disappeared. Something behind the screen was hissing like a snake.

Claude now saw a table laid in the middle of the studio. On a rough white cloth were plates, knives, and forks, large coffee cups with flowers coarsely painted on a gray ground with a faint tinge of blue in it, rolls of bread, butter, a cake richly brown in color. A vase of coarse, but effective pottery, full of scented wild geranium, stood in the midst. Claude took off hat and coat, hung them up on a hook, and glanced around.

Certainly Charmian had arranged the furniture well, chosen it well, too. The place looked cosy, and everything was in excellent taste. There was comfort without luxury. Claude felt that he ought to be very grateful.

"Coming!"

Her voice cried out from behind the screen, and she appeared bearing a large dish full of smoking sausages, which she set down on the table.

"Now for the eggs and the coffee!" she said.

Another moment and they were on the table, too, with a plateful of buttered toast.

"Studio fare!" she said, taking off the blue apron, pulling down her sleeves, and looking at Claude. "Are you surprised?"

"I was for the first moment."

"And then?"

"Well, I had felt sure you were up to something, that you had some scheme in your head, some plan for to-day. But I didn't connect it with sausages."

Her expression changed slightly.

"Perhaps it isn't only sausages. But it begins with them. Are you hungry?"

"Yes, very. I've been walking in Battersea Park."

"Claudie, how awful!"

They sat down and fell to—Charmian's expression. She was playing at the Vie de Bohème, but she thought she was being rather serious, that she was helping to launch Claude in a new and suitable life. And behind the light absurdity of this quite unnecessary meal there was intention, grave and intense. The wasted two months must be made up for, the hours given to the *French Revolution* be redeemed. This meal was only the prelude to something else.

"Is it good?" she asked, as Claude ate and drank.

"Excellent! Where have you been to-day?"

"I've seen Madre and Susan Fleet."

"Miss Fleet at last."

"Yes. It is so tiresome her moving about so much. I care for her more than for any woman in London. All this time she's been in Paris doing things for Adelaide Shiffney."

"Did Madre know about to-night?"

"No."

"Why didn't you tell her? Why not have asked her to come? We belong to her and she to us. It would have been natural."

"I love Madre. But I didn't want even her to-night."

Claude realized that he was assisting at a prelude. But he only said:

"I suppose she is going to Mrs. Shiffney's to-night?"

"Yes."

When they had finished Charmian said:

"Now I'll clear away."

"I'll help you."

"No, you mustn't. I want you to sit down in that cosy chair there, and light your cigar—oh, or your pipe! Yes, to-night you must smoke a pipe."

"I haven't brought it."

"Well, then, a cigar. I won't be long."

She began clearing the table. Claude obediently drew out his cigar-case. He still felt uneasy. What was coming? He could not tell. But he felt almost sure that something was coming which would distress his secret sensitiveness, his strong reserve.

He lit a cigar, and sat down in the armchair Charmian had indicated. She flitted in and out, removing things from the table, shook out and folded the rough white cloth, laid it away somewhere behind the screen, and at last came to sit down.

The studio was lit up with electric light.

"There's too much light," she said. "Don't move. I'll do it."

She went over to the door, and turned out two burners, leaving only one alight.

"Isn't that ever so much better?" she said, coming to sit down near Claude.

"Well, perhaps it is."

"Cosier, more intime."

She sat down with a little sigh.

"I'm going to have a cigarette."

She drew out a thin silver case, opened it.

"A teeny Russian one."

Claude struck a match. She put the cigarette between her lips, and leaned forward to the tiny flame.

"That's it."

She sighed.

After a moment of silence she said:

"I'm glad you couldn't work in the little room. If you had been able to we should never have had this."

"We!" thought Claude.

"And," she continued, "I feel this is the beginning of great things for you. I feel as if, without meaning to, I'd taken you away from your path, as if now I understood better. But I don't think it was quite my fault if I didn't understand. Claudie, do you know you're terribly reserved?"

"Am I?" he said.

He shifted in his chair, took the cigar out of his mouth, and put it back again.

"Well, aren't you? Two whole months, and you never told me you couldn't work."

"I hated to, after you'd taken so much trouble with that room."

"I know. But, still, directly you did tell me, I perfectly understood. I"—she spoke with distinct pressure—"I am a wife who can understand. Don't you remember that night at Jacques Sennier's opera?"

"Yes."

"Didn't I understand then? At the end when they were all applauding? I've got your letter, the letter you wrote that night. I shall always keep it. Such a burning letter, saying I had inspired you, that my love and belief had made you feel as if you could do something great if you changed your life, if you lived with me. You remember?"

"Yes, Charmian, of course I remember."

Claude strove with all his might to speak warmly, impetuously, to get back somehow the warmth, the impulse that had driven him to write that letter. But he remembered, too, his terrible desire to get that letter back out of the box. And he felt guilty. He was glad just then that Charmian had turned out those two burners.

"In these months I think we seem to have got away from that letter, from that night."

Claude became cold. Dread overtook him. Had she detected his lack of love? Was she going to tax him with it?

"Oh, surely not! But how do you mean?" he broke in anxiously. "That was a special night. We were all on fire. One cannot always live at that high pressure. If we could we should wear ourselves out."

"Yes, perhaps. But geniuses do live at high pressure. And you are a genius."

At that moment the peculiar sense of being less than the average man, which is characteristic of greatly talented men in their periods of melancholy and reaction, was alive in Claude. Charmian's words intensified it.

"If you reckon on having married a genius, I'm afraid you're wrong," he said, with a bluntness not usual in him.

"It isn't that!" she said quickly, almost sharply. "But I can't forget things Max Elliot has said about you—long ago. And Madre thinks—I know that, though she doesn't say anything. And, besides, I have heard some of your things."

"And what did you really think of them?" he asked abruptly.

He had never before asked his wife what she thought of his music. She had often spoken about it, but never because he had asked her to. But this apparently was to be an evening of a certain frankness. Charmian had evidently planned that it should be so. He would try to meet her.

"That's partly what I wanted to talk about to-night."

Claude felt as if something in him suddenly curled up. Was Charmian about to criticize his works unfavorably, severely perhaps? At once he felt within him a sort of angry contempt for her judgment.

Charmian was faintly conscious of his fierce independence, as she had been on the night of their first meeting; of the something strong and permanent which his manner so often contradicted, a mental remoteness which was disagreeable to her, but which impressed her. To-night, however, she was resolved to play the Madame Sennier to her husband, to bring up battalions of will.

"Well?" Claude said.

"I think, just as I know Madre does, that your things are wonderful. But I don't think they are for everybody."

"For everybody! How do you mean?"

"Oh, I know the bad taste of the crowd. Why, Madre always laughs at me for my horror of the crowd. But there is now a big cosmopolitan public which has taste. Look at the success of Strauss, for instance, of Debussy, and now of Jacques Sennier—our own Elgar, too! What I mean is that

perhaps the things you have done hitherto are for the very few. There is something terrible about them, I think. They might almost frighten people. They might almost make people dislike you."

She was thinking of the Burningtons, the Drakes, of other Sennier-worshippers.

"I believe it is partly because of the words you set," she added. "Great words, of course. But where can they be sung? Not everywhere. And people are so strange about the Bible."

"Strange about the Bible!"

"English people, and even Americans, at any rate. There is a sort of queer, absurd tradition. One begins to think of oratorio."

She paused. Claude said nothing. He was feeling hot all over.

"I can't help wishing, for your own sake, that you wouldn't always go to the Bible for your inspiration."

"I daresay it is very absurd of me."

"Claudie, you could never be absurd."

"Anybody can be absurd."

"I could never think you absurd. But I suppose everyone can make a mistake. It seems to me as if there are a lot of channels, some short, ending abruptly, some long, going almost to the center of things. And genius is like a liquid poured into them. I only want you to pour yours into a long channel. Is it very stupid, or perverse, of me?"

As she said the last words she felt deeply conscious of her feminine intelligence, of that delicate ingenuity peculiar to women, unattainable by man.

"No, Charmian, of course not. So you think I've been pouring into a very short channel?"

"Don't you?"

"I'm afraid I've never thought about it."

"I know. It wants another to do that, I think."

"Very likely."

"You care for strange things. One can see that by your choice of words. But there are strange and wonderful words not in the Bible. The other day I was looking into Rossetti's

poems. I read *Staff and Scrip* again and *Sister Helen*. There are marvellous passages in both of those. I wish sometimes you'd let me come in here, when you're done working, and make tea for you, and just read aloud to you anything interesting I come across."

That was the beginning of a new connection between husband and wife, the beginning also of a new epoch in Claude's life as a composer.

When they left the studio that night he had agreed to Charmian's proposal that she should spend some of her spare time in looking out words that might be suitable for a musical setting, "in your peculiar vein," as she said. By doing this he had abandoned his complete liberty as a creator. So at least he felt. Yet he also felt unable to refuse his wife's request. To do so, after all her beneficent energies employed on his behalf, would be churlish. He might have tried to explain that the something within him which was really valuable could not brook bridle or spur, that unless it were left to range where it would in untrammelled liberty, it was worth very little to the world. He knew this. But a man may deny his knowledge even to himself, deny it persistently through long periods of time. And there was the weakness in Claude which instinctively wished to give to others what they expected of him, or strongly desired from him. On that evening in the studio Charmian's definiteness gained a point for her. She was encouraged by this fact to become more definite.

They were in Kensington by ten o'clock that night. Charmian was in high spirits. A strong hope was dawning in her. Already she felt almost like a collaborator with Claude.

"Don't let us go to bed!" she exclaimed. "Let us dress and go to Adelaide Shiffney's."

"Very well," replied Claude. "By the way, what were you going to tell me about her?"

"Oh, nothing!" she said.

And they went up to dress.

There was a crowd in Grosvenor Square. A good many people were still abroad, but there were enough in London to fill Mrs. Shiffney's drawing-rooms. And notorieties, beauties, and those mysterious nobodies who "go everywhere" until

they almost succeed in becoming somebodies, were to be seen on every side. Charmian perceived at once that this was one of Adelaide's non-exclusive parties. Mrs. Shiffney seldom entertained on a very large scale.

"One bore, or one frump, can ruin a party," was a favorite saying of hers. But even she, now and then, condescended to "clear people off." Charmian realized that Adelaide was making a clearance to-night.

Since her marriage with Claude she had not been invited to No. 14 B—Mrs. Shiffney's number in the Square—before.

As she came in to the first drawing-room and looked quickly round she thought:

"She is clearing off me and Claude."

And for a moment she wished they had not come. Her old horror of being numbered with the great crowd of the undistinguished came upon her once more. Then she thought of the conversation in the studio, and she hardened herself in resolve.

"He shall be famous. I will make him famous, whether he wishes it, cares for it, or not."

Mrs. Shiffney was not standing close to the first door to "receive" solemnly. She could not "be bothered" to do that. The Heaths presently came upon her, looking very large and Roman, in the middle of the second drawing-room.

In the room just beyond a small orchestra was playing. This was a sure sign of a "clearance" party. Mrs. Shiffney never had an orchestra playing alone, and steadily, through an evening unless bores and frumps were present. "Hungarians in distress" she called these uniformed musicians, "trying to help bores in distress and failing inevitably."

She held out her hand to Charmian with a faintly ironic smile.

"I'm so glad to see you. Ah, Mr. Heath—Benedick as the married man. I expect you are doing something wonderful as one hears nothing about you. The deep silence fills me with expectation."

She smiled again, and turned to speak to an old lady with fuzzy white hair.

"One of the fuzzywuzzies who go to private views, and who insist on knowing me once a year for my sins."

Charmian's lips tightened as she walked slowly on.

She met many people whom she knew, too many; and that evening she felt peculiarly aware of the insignificance of Claude and herself, combined as a "married couple," in the eyes of this society. What were they? Just two people with fifteen hundred a year and a little house near Kensington High Street. As an unmarried girl in Berkeley Square, with a popular mother, possibilities had floated about her. Clever, rising men came to that house. She had charm. She was "in" everything. Now she felt that a sort of fiat had been pronounced, perhaps by Adelaide Shiffney, and her following, "Charmian's dropping out."

No doubt she exaggerated. She was half conscious that she was exaggerating. But there was surely a change in the attitude people adopted toward her. She attributed it to Mrs. Shiffney. "Adelaide hates Claude," she said to herself, adding a moment later the woman's reason, "because she was in love with him before he married me, and he wouldn't look at her." Such a hatred of Adelaide's would almost have pleased her, had not Adelaide unfortunately been so very influential.

Claude caught sight of Mrs. Mansfield and went to join her, while Charmian spoke to Lady Mildred Burnington, and then to Max Elliot.

Lady Mildred, whose eyes looked more feverish even than usual, and whose face was ravaged, as if by some passion or sorrow for ever burning within her, had a perfunctory manner which fought with her expression. Her face was too much alive. Her manner was half dead. Only when she played the violin was the whole woman in accord, harmonious. Then truth, vigor, intention emerged from her, and she conquered. To-night she spoke of the prospects for the opera season, looking about her as if seeking fresh causes for dissatisfaction.

"It's going to be dull," she said. "Covent Garden has things all its own way, and therefore it goes to sleep. But in June we shall have Sennier. That is something. Without

him it would really not be worth while to take a box. I told Mr. Brett so."

"What did he say?" asked Charmian.

"One Sennier makes a summer."

It was at this moment that Max Elliot came up, looking as he nearly always did, cheerful and ready to be kind.

"I know," he said to Lady Mildred, "you're complaining about the opera. "I've just been with the Admiral."

"Hilary knows less about music than even the average Englishman."

"Well, he's been swearing, and even—saving your presence—cursing by Strauss."

"He thinks that places him with the connoisseurs. It's his ambition to prove to the world that one may be an Admiral and yet be quite intelligent, even have what is called taste. He declines to be a sea-dog."

"I think it's only living up to you. But have you really no hope of the opera?"

"Very little—unless Sennier saves the situation."

"Has he anything new?" asked Charmian.

Max Elliot looked happily evasive.

"Madame Sennier says he hasn't."

"We ought to have a rival enterprise here as they have in New York at present," said Lady Mildred.

"Sennier's success at the Metropolitan has nearly killed the New Era," said Elliot. "But Crayford has any amount of pluck, and a purse that seems inexhaustible. I suppose you know he's to be here to-night."

"Mr. Jacob Crayford, the Impresario!" exclaimed Charmian. "He's in England?"

"Arrived to-day by the *Lusitania* in search of talent, of someone who can 'produce the goods' as he calls it. Adelaide sent a note to meet him at the Savoy, and he's coming. Shows his pluck, doesn't it? This is the enemy's camp."

Max Elliot laughed gaily. He loved the strong battles of art, backed by "commercial enterprise," and was friends with everyone though he could be such a keen and concentrated partisan.

"Crayford would give a hundred thousand dollars without

a murmur to get Jacques away from the Metropolitan," he continued.

"Won't he go for that?" asked Lady Mildred, in her hollow voice. "Is Madame Sennier holding out for two hundred thousand?"

Again Max Elliot looked happily evasive.

"Henriette! Has she anything to do with it?"

"Mr. Elliot! You know she arranges everything for her husband."

"Do I? Do I really? Ah, there is Crayford!"

"Where?" said Charmian, turning round rather sharply.

"He's going up to Adelaide now. He's taking her hand, just over there. Margot Drake is speaking to him."

"Margot—of course! But I can't see them."

Max Elliot moved.

"If you stand here. Are you so very anxious to see him?"

Charmian saw that he was slightly surprised.

"Because I've heard so much about the New York battle from Margot."

"To be sure!"

"What—that little man!"

"Why not?"

"With the tiny beard! It's the tiniest beard I ever saw."

"More brain than beard," said Max Elliot. "I can assure you Mr. Crayford is one of the most energetic, determined, enterprising, and courageous men on either side of the Atlantic. Diabolically clever, too, in his way, but an idealist at heart. Some people in America think that last fact puts him at a disadvantage as a manager. It certainly gives him point and even charm as a man."

"I should like very much to know him," said Charmian. "Of course you know him?"

"Yes."

"Do introduce me to him."

She had seen a faintly doubtful expression flit rapidly across his face, and noticed that Mr. Crayford was already surrounded. Adelaide Shiffney kept him in conversation. Margot Drake

stood close to him, and fixed her dark eyes upon him with an expression of still determination. Paul Lane had come up to the group. Three or four well-known singers were converging upon it from different parts of the room. Charmian quite understood. But she thought of the conversation in the studio which marked the beginning of a new epoch in her life with Claude, and she repeated quietly, but with determination:

"Please introduce me to him."

CHAPTER XVII

A WOMAN knows in a moment whether a man is susceptible to woman's charm, to sex charm, or not. There are men who love, who have loved, or who will love, a woman. And there are men who love woman. Charmian had not been with Mr. Jacob Crayford for more than two minutes before she knew that he belonged to the latter class. She only spent some five minutes in his company, after Max Elliot had introduced them to each other. But she came away from Grosvenor Square with a very definite conception of his personality.

Mr. Crayford was small, thin, and wiry-looking, with large keen brown eyes, brown and gray hair, growing over a well-formed and artistic head which was slightly protuberant at the back, and rather large, determined features. At a first glance he looked "Napoleonic." Perhaps this was intentional on his part. His skin was brown, and appeared to be unusually dry. He wore the tiny beard noticed by Charmian, and a carefully trained and sweeping moustache. His ears slightly suggested a faun. His hands were nervous, and showed energy, and the tendency to grasp and to hold. His voice was a thin tenor, with occasional, rather surprisingly deep chest notes, when he wished to be specially emphatic. His smart, well-cut clothes, and big emerald shirt stud, and sleeve links, suggested the successful impresario. His manner was, on a first introduction, decidedly businesslike, cool, and watchful. But in his eyes there were sometimes intense flashes which betokened a strong imagination, a temperament capable of emotion and excitement. His eyelids were large and rounded. And on the left one there was a little brown wart. When he was introduced to Charmian he sent her a glance which she interpreted as meaning, "What does this woman want of me?" It showed her how this man was bombarded, how instinctively ready he was to be alertly on the defensive if he judged defense to be necessary.

"I've heard so much of your battles, Mr. Crayford," she said, "that I wanted to know the great fighter."

She had assumed her very self-possessed manner, the minx-manner as some people called it. Claude had known it well in the "early days." It gave her a certain very modern charm in the eyes of some men. And it suggested a woman who lived in and for the world, who had nothing to do with any work. There was daintiness in it, and a hint of impertinence.

Mr. Crayford smiled faintly. He had a slight tic, moving his eyebrows sometimes suddenly upward.

"A good set-to now and then does no one any harm that I know of," he said, speaking rapidly.

"They say over here you've got the worst of it this season."

"Do they indeed? Very kind and obliging of them, I'm sure."

"I hope it isn't true."

"Are you an enemy of the great and only Jacques then?" said Mr. Crayford.

"Monsieur Sennier? Oh, no! I was at the first performance of his *Paradis Terrestre*, and it altered my whole life."

"Well, they like it over in New York. And I've got to find another Paradise to put up against it just as quick as I know how."

"I do hope you'll be successful."

"I'll put Europe through my sieve anyway," said Mr. Crayford. "No man can do more. And very few men know the way to do as much. Are you interested in music?"

"Intensely."

She paused, looking at the little man before her. She was hesitating whether to tell him that she had married a musician or to refrain. Something told her to refrain, and she added:

"I've always lived among musical people and heard the best of everything."

"Well, opera's the only thing nowadays, the only really big proposition. And it's going to be a bigger proposition than most people dream of."

His eyes flashed.

"Wait till I build an opera house in London, something better than that old barn of yours over against the Police Station."

"Are you going to build an opera house here?"

"Why not? But I've got to find some composers. They're somewhere about. Bound to be. The thing is to find them. It was a mere chance Sennier coming up. If he hadn't married his wife he'd be starving at this minute, and I'd be licking the Metropolitan into a cocked hat."

Charmian longed to put her hand on the little man's arm and to say:

"I've married a musician, I've married a genius. Take him up. Give him his chance."

But she looked at those big brown eyes which confronted her under the twitching eyebrows. And now that the flash was gone she saw in them the soul of the business man. Claude was not a "business proposition." It was useless to speak of him yet.

"I hope you'll find your composer," she said quietly, almost with a dainty indifference.

Then someone came up and claimed Crayford with determination.

"That's a pretty girl," he remarked. "Is she married? I didn't catch her name."

"Oh, yes, she's married to an unknown man who composes."

"The devil she is!"

The lips above the tiny beard stretched in a smile that was rather sardonic.

Before going away Charmian wanted to have a little talk with Susan Fleet, who was helping Mrs. Shiffney with the "fuzzywuzzies." She found her at length standing before a buffet, and entertaining a very thin and angular woman, dressed in black, with scarlet flowers growing out of her toilet in various unexpected places. Miss Fleet welcomed Charmian with her usual unimpassioned directness, and introduced her quietly to Miss Gretch, as her companion was called, surprisingly.

Miss Gretch, who was drinking claret cup, and eating little rolls which contained hidden treasure of pâté de foie gras, bowed and smiled with anxious intensity, then abruptly became unnaturally grave, and gazed with a sort of piercing attention at Charmian's hair, jewels, gown, fan, and shoes.

"She seems to be memorizing me," thought Charmian, wondering who Miss Gretch was, and how she came to be there.

"Stay here just a minute, will you?" said Susan Fleet. "Adelaide wants me, I see. I'll be back directly."

"Please be sure to come. I want to talk to you," said Charmian.

As Susan Fleet was going she murmured:

"Miss Gretch writes for papers."

Charmian turned to the angular guest with a certain alacrity. They talked together with animation till Susan Fleet came back.

A week later, on coming down to breakfast before starting for the studio, Claude found among his letters a thin missive, open at the ends, and surrounded with yellow paper. He tore the paper, and three newspaper cuttings dropped on to his plate.

"What's this?" he said to Charmian, who was sitting opposite to him. "Romeike and Curtice! Why should they send me anything?"

He picked up one of the cuttings.

"It's from a paper called *My Lady*."

"What is it about?"

"It seems to be an account of Mrs. Shiffney's party, with something marked in blue pencil, 'Mrs. Claude Heath came in late with her brilliant husband, whose remarkable musical compositions have not yet attained to the celebrity which will undoubtedly be theirs within no long time. The few who have heard Mr. Heath's music place him with Elgar, Max Reger, and Delius.' Then a description of what you were wearing. How very ridiculous and objectionable!"

Claude looked furious and almost ashamed.

"Here's something else! 'A Composer's Studio,' from *The World and His Wife*. It really is insufferable."

"Why? What can it say?"

"'Mr. Claude Heath, the rising young composer, who recently married the beautiful Miss Charmian Mansfield, of Berkeley Square, has just rented and furnished elaborately a magnificent studio in Renwick Place, Chelsea. Exquisite Persian rugs stew the floor—' "

Claude stopped, and with an abrupt movement tore the cuttings to pieces and threw them on the carpet.

"What can it mean? Who on earth—? Charmian, do you know anything of this?"

"Oh," she said, with a sort of earnest disgust, mingled with surprise, "it must be that dreadful Miss Gretch!"

"Dreadful Miss Gretch! I never heard of her. Who is she?"

"At Adelaide Shiffney's the other night Susan Fleet introduced me to a Miss Gretch. I believe she sometimes writes, for papers or something. I had a little talk with her while I was waiting for Susan to come back."

"Did you tell her about the studio?"

"Let me see! Did I? Yes, I believe I did say something. You see, Claude, it was the night of—"

"I know it was. But how could you—?"

"How could I suppose things said in a private conversation would ever appear in print? I only said that you had a studio because you composed and wanted quiet, and that I had been picking up a few old things to make it look homey. How extraordinary of Miss Gretch!"

"It has made me look very ridiculous. I am quite unknown, and therefore it is impossible for the public to be interested in me. Miss Gretch is certainly a very inefficient journalist. Elgar! Delius too! I wonder she didn't compare me with Scriabine while she was about it. How hateful it is being made a laughing-stock like this."

"Oh, nobody reads those papers, I expect. Still, Miss Gretch—"

"Gretch! What a name!" said Claude.

His anger vanished in an abrupt fit of laughter, but he started for the studio in half an hour looking decidedly grim. When he had gone Charmian picked up the torn cuttings which were lying on the carpet. She had been very slow in finishing breakfast that day.

Since her meeting with Jacob Crayford her mind had run perpetually on opera. She could not forget his words, spoken with the authority of the man who knew, "Opera's the only thing nowadays, the only really big proposition." She could not forget that he had left England to "put Europe through his sieve" for a composer who could stand up against Jacques Sennier. What a chance there was now for a new man. He was being actively searched for. If only Claude had written an opera! If only he would write an opera now!

Charmian never doubted her husband's ability to do something big. Her instinct told her that he had greatness of some kind in him. His music had deeply impressed her. But she was sure it was not the sort of thing to reach a wide public. It seemed to her against the trend of taste of the day. There was an almost terrible austerity in it, combined, she believed, with great power and originality. She longed to hear some of it given in public with the orchestra and voices. She had thought of trying to "get hold of" one of the big conductors, Harold Dane, or Vernon Randall, of trying to persuade him to give Claude a hearing at Queen's Hall. Then a certain keen prudence had held her back. A voice had whispered, "Be patient!" She realized the importance of the first step taken in public. Jacques Sennier had been utterly unknown in England. He appeared as the composer of the *Paradis Terrestre*. If he had been known already as the composer of a number of things which had left the public indifferent, would he have made the enormous success he had made? She remembered Mascagni and his *Cavalleria*, Leoncavallo and his *Pagliacci*. And she was almost glad that Claude was unknown. At any rate, he had never made a mistake. That was something to be thankful for. He must never make a mistake. But there would be no harm in arousing a certain interest in his personality, in his work. A man like Jacob Crayford kept

a sharp look-out for fresh talent. He read all that appeared about new composers of course. Or someone read for him. Even "that dreadful Miss Gretch's" lucubrations might come under his notice.

For a week now Claude had gone every day after breakfast to the studio. Charmian had not yet disturbed him there. She felt that she must handle her husband gently. Although he was so kind, so disposed to be sympathetic, to meet people half way, she knew well that there was something in him to which as yet she had never probed, which she did not understand. She was sufficiently intelligent not to deceive herself about this, not to think that because Claude was a man of course she, a woman, could see all of him clearly. The hidden something in her husband might be a thing resistent. She believed she must go to work gently, subtly, even though she meant to be very firm. So she had let Claude have a week to himself. This gave him time to feel that the studio was a sanctum, perhaps also that it was a rather lonely one. Meanwhile, she had been searching for "words."

That task was a difficult one, because her mind was obsessed by the thought of opera. Oratorio had always been a hateful form of art to her. She had grown up thinking it old-fashioned, out-moded, absurdly "plum-puddingy," and British. In the realm of orchestral music she was more at home. She honestly loved orchestral music divorced from words. But the music of Claude's which she knew was joined with words. And he must do something with words. For that, as it were, would lead the way toward opera. Orchestral music was more remote from opera. If Claude set some wonderful poem, and a man like Jacob Crayford heard the setting, he might see a talent for opera in it. But he could scarcely see that in a violin concerto, a quartet for strings, or a symphony. So she argued. And she searched anxiously for words which might be set dramatically, descriptively. She dared not assail Claude yet with a libretto for opera. She felt sure he would say he had no talent for such work, that he was not drawn toward the theater. But if she could lead him gradually toward things essentially dramatic, she might

wake up in him forces the tendency of which he had never suspected.

She re-read Rossetti, Keats, Shelley, dipped into William Morris,—Wordsworth no—into Fiona Macleod, William Watson, John Davidson, Alfred Noyes. Now and then she was strongly attracted by something, she thought, "Will it do?" And always at such moments a vision of Jacob Crayford seemed to rise up before her, with large brown eyes, ears like a faun, nervous hands, and the tiny beard. "Is it a business proposition?" The moving lips said that. And she gazed again at the poem which had arrested her attention, she thought, "Is it a business proposition?" Keats's terribly famous *Belle Dame Sans Merci* really attracted her more than anything else. She knew it had been set by Cyril Scott, and other ultra-modern composers, but she felt that Claude could do something wonderful with it. Yet perhaps it was too well known.

One lyric of William Watson's laid a spell upon her:

"Pass, thou wild heart,
Wild heart of youth that still
Hast half a will
To stay.
I grow too old a comrade, let us part.
Pass thou away."

She read that and the preceding verse again and again, in the grip of a strange and melancholy fascination, dreaming. She woke, and remembered that she was young, that Claude was young. But she had reached out and touched old age. She had realized, newly, the shortness of the time. And a sort of fever assailed her. Claude must begin, must waste no more precious hours; she would take him the poem of William Watson, would read it to him. He might make of it a song, and in the making he would learn something perhaps—to hasten on the path.

She started for the studio one day, taking the *Belle Dame*, William Watson's poems, and two or three books of French poetry, Verlaine, Montesquiou, Moréas.

She arrived in Renwick Place just after four o'clock. She meant to make tea for Claude and herself, and had brought with her some little cakes and a bottle of milk. Quite a load she was carrying. The gouty hands of the caretaker went up when he saw her.

"My, ma'am, what a heavy lot for you to be carrying!"

"I'm strong. Mr. Heath's in the studio?"

Before the man could reply she heard the sound of a piano.

"Oh, yes, he is. Is there water there? Yes. That's right. I'm going to boil the kettle and make tea."

She went on quickly, opened the door softly, and slipped in.

Claude, who sat with his back to her playing, did not hear her. She crept behind the screen into what she called "the kitchen." What fun! She could make the tea without his knowing that she was there, and bring it in to him when he stopped playing.

As she softly prepared things she listened attentively, with a sort of burning attention, to the music. She had not heard it before. She knew that when her husband was composing he did not go to the piano. This must be something which he had just composed and was trying over. It sounded to her mystic, remote, very strange, almost like a soul communing with itself; then more violent, more sonorous, but always very strange.

The kettle began to boil. She got ready the cups. In turning she knocked two spoons down from a shelf. They fell on the uncarpeted floor.

"What's that? Who's there?"

Claude had stopped playing abruptly. His voice was the voice of a man startled and angry.

"Who's there?" he repeated loudly.

She heard him get up and come toward the screen.

"Claudie, do forgive me! I slipped in. I thought I would make tea for you. It's all ready. But I didn't mean to interrupt you. I was waiting till you had finished. I'm so sorry."

"You, Charmian!"

There was an odd remote expression in his eyes, and his whole face looked excited.

"Do—do forgive me, Claudie! Those dreadful spoons!"

She picked them up.

"Of course. What are all these books doing here?"

"I brought them. I thought after tea we might talk over words. You remember?"

"Oh, yes. Well—but I've begun on something."

"Were you playing it just now?"

"Some of it."

"What is it?"

"Francis Thompson's *The Hound of Heaven*."

Jacob Crayford—what would he think of that sort of thing?

"You know it, don't you?" Claude said, as she was silent.

"I've read it, but quite a while ago. I don't remember it well. Of course I know it's very wonderful. Madre loves it."

"She was speaking of it at the Shiffney's the other night. That's why it occurred to me to study it."

"Oh. Well, now you have stopped shall we have tea?"

"Yes. I've done enough for to-day."

After tea Charmian said:

"I'll study *The Hound of Heaven* again. But now do you mind if I read you two or three of the things I have here?"

"No," he said kindly, but not at all eagerly. "Do read anything you like."

It was six o'clock when Charmian read Watson's poem "to finish up with." Claude who, absorbed secretly by the thought of his new composition, had listened so far without any keen interest, at moments had not listened at all, though preserving a decent attitude and manner of attention, suddenly woke up into genuine enthusiasm.

"Give me that, Charmian!" he exclaimed. "I scarcely ever write a song. But I'll set that."

She gave him the book eagerly.

That evening they were at home. After dinner Claude went to his little room to write some letters, and Charmian read *The Hound of Heaven*. She decided against it. Beauti-

ful though it was, she considered it too mystic, too religious. She was sure many people could not understand it.

"I wish Madre hadn't talked to Claude about it," she thought. "He thinks so much of her opinion. And she doesn't care in the least whether Claude makes a hit with the public or not."

The mere thought of the word "hit" in connection with Mrs. Mansfield almost made Charmian smile.

"I suppose there's something dreadfully vulgar about me," she said to herself. "But I belong to the young generation. I can't help loving success."

Mrs. Mansfield had been the friend, was the friend, of many successful men. They came to her for sympathy, advice. She followed their upward careers with interest, rejoiced in their triumphs. But she cared for the talent in a man rather than for what it brought him. Charmian knew that. And long ago Mrs. Mansfield had spoken of the plant that must grow in darkness. At this time Charmian began almost to dread her mother's influence upon her husband.

She was cheered by a little success.

Claude set Watson's poem rapidly. He played the song to Charmian, and she was delighted with it.

"I know people would love that!" she cried.

"If it was properly sung by someone with temperament," he replied. "And now I can go on with *The Hound of Heaven*."

Her heart sank.

"I'm only a little afraid they may think you are imitating Elgar," she murmured after a moment.

"Imitating Elgar!"

"Not that you are, or ever would do such a thing. It isn't your music, it's the subject, that makes me a little afraid. It seems to me to be an Elgar subject."

"Really!"

The conversation dropped, and was not resumed. But a fortnight later, when Charmian came to make tea in the studio, and asked as to the progress of the new work, Claude said rather coldly:

"I'm not going on with it at present."

She saw that he was feeling depressed, and realized why. But she was secretly triumphant at the success of her influence, secretly delighted with her own cleverness. How deftly, with scarcely more than a word, she had turned him from his task. Surely thus had Madame Sennier influenced, guided her husband.

"I believe I could do anything with Claude," she said to herself that day.

"Play me your Watson song again, Claudie," she said. "I do love it so."

"It's only a trifle."

"I love it!" she repeated.

He sat down at the piano and played it to her once more. When he had finished she said:

"I've found someone who could sing that gloriously."

"Who?" he asked.

Playing the song had excited him. He turned eagerly toward her.

"A young American who has been studying in Paris. I met him at the Drakes' two or three days ago. Mr. Jacob Crayford, the opera man, thinks a great deal of him, I'm told. Let me ask him to come here one day and try the *Wild Heart*. May I?"

"Yes, do," said Claude.

"And meanwhile what are you working on instead of *The Hound of Heaven*?"

Claude's expression changed. He seemed to stiffen with reserve. But he replied, with a kind of elaborate carelessness:

"I think of trying a violin concerto. That would be quite a new departure for me. But you know the violin was my second study at the Royal College."

"That won't do," thought Charmian.

"If only Kreisler would take it up when it is finished as he took up—" she began.

Claude interrupted her.

"It may take me months, so it's no use thinking about who is to play it. Probably it will never be played at all."

"Then why compose it?" she nearly said.

But she did not say it. What was the use, when she had resolved that the concerto should be abandoned as *The Hound of Heaven* had been?

She brought the young American, whose name was Alston Lake, to the studio. Claude took a fancy to him at once. Lake sang the *Wild Heart*, tried it a second time, became enthusiastic about it. His voice was a baritone, and exactly suited the song. He begged Claude to let him sing the song during the season at the parties for which he was engaged. They studied it together seriously. During these rehearsals Charmian sat in an armchair a little way from the piano listening, and feeling the intensity of an almost feverish anticipation within her.

This was the first step on the way of ambition. And she had caused Claude to take it. Never would he have taken it without her. As she listened to the two men talking, discussing together, trying passages again and again, forgetful for the moment of her, she thrilled with a sense of achieved triumph. Glory seemed already within her grasp. She ran forward in hope, like a child almost. She saw the goal like a thing quite near, almost close to her.

"People will love that song! They will love it!" she said to herself.

And their love, what might it not do for Claude, and to Claude? Surely it would infect him with the desire for more of that curious heat-giving love of the world for a great talent. Surely it would carry him on, away from the old reserves, from the secrecies which had held him too long, from the darkness in which he had labored. For whom? For himself perhaps, or no one. Surely it would carry him on along the great way to the light that illumined the goal.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT the end of November in that same year the house in Kensington Square was let, the studio in Renwick Place was shut up, and Claude and Charmian were staying in Berkeley Square with Mrs. Mansfield for a couple of nights before their departure for Algiers, where they intended to stay for an indefinite time. They had decided first to go to the Hotel St. George at Mustapha Supérieur, and from there to prosecute their search for a small and quiet villa in which Claude could settle down to work. Most of their luggage was already packed. A case of music, containing a large number of full scores, stood in Mrs. Mansfield's hall. And Charmian was out at the dressmaker's with Susan Fleet, trying on the new gowns she was taking with her to a warmer climate than England's.

This vital change in two lives had come about through a song.

The young American singer, Alston Lake, had been true to his word. During the past London season he had sung Claude's *Wild Heart of Youth* everywhere. And people, the right people, had liked it. Swiftly composed in an hour of enthusiasm it was really a beautiful and original song. It was a small thing, but it was a good thing. And it was presented to the public by a new and enthusiastic man who at once made his mark both as a singer and as a personality. Although one song cannot make anybody a composer of mark in the esteem of a great public, yet Claude's drew some attention to him. But it did more than this. It awoke in Claude a sort of spurious desire for greater popularity, which was assiduously fostered by Charmian. The real man, deep down, had a still and inexorable contempt for laurels easily won, for the swift applause of drawing-rooms. But the weakness in Claude, a thing of the surface, weed floating on a pool that had

depths, responded to the applause, to the congratulations, with an almost anxious quickness. His mind began to concern itself too often with the feeble question, "What do people want of me? What do they want me to do?" Often he played the accompaniment to his song at parties that season when Alston Lake sang it, and he enjoyed too much—that is his surface enjoyed too much—the pleasure it gave, the demonstrations it evoked. He received with too much eagerness the congratulations of easily touched women.

Mrs. Mansfield noticed all this, and it diminished her natural pleasure in her son-in-law's little success. But Charmian was delighted to see that Claude was "becoming human at last." The weakness in her husband made her trust more fully her own power. She realized that events were working with her, were helping her to increase her influence. She blossomed with expectation.

Alston Lake had his part in the circumstances which were now about to lead the Heaths away from England, were to place them in new surroundings, submit them to fresh influences.

His voice had been "discovered" in America by Jacob Crayford, who had sent him to Europe to be trained, and intended, if things went well and he proved to have the value expected of him, to bring him out at the opera house in New York, which was trying to put a fight against the Metropolitan.

"I shouldn't wonder if I've got another Battistini in that boy!" Crayford sometimes said to people. "He's got a wonderful voice, but I wouldn't have paid for his training if he hadn't something that's bullier."

"What's that?"

"The devil's own ambition."

Crayford had not mistaken his man. He seldom did. Alston Lake had a will of iron and was possessed of a passionate determination to succeed. He had a driving reason that made him resolve to "win out" as he called it. His father, who was a prosperous banker in Wall Street, had sternly vetoed an artistic career for his only son. Alston had re-

belled, then had given in for a time, and gone into Wall Street. Instead of proving his unfitness for a career he loathed, he showed a marked aptitude for business, inherited no doubt from his father. He could do well what he hated doing. This fact accentuated his father's wrath when he abruptly threw up business and finally decided that he would be a singer or nothing. The Wall Street magnate stopped all supplies. Then Crayford took Alston up. For three years Alston had lived on the impresario's charity in Paris. Was it matter for wonder if he set his teeth and resolved to win out? He had in him the grit of young America, that intensity of life which sweeps through veins like a tide.

"Father's going to see presently," he often said to himself. "He's just got to, and that's all there is to it."

This young man was almost as a weapon in Charmian's hand.

He was charming, and specially charming in his enthusiasm. He had the American readiness to meet others half way, the American lack of shyness. Despite the iron of his will, the fierceness of his young determination, he was often naive almost as a schoolboy. The evil of Paris had swirled about him and had left him unstained by its blackness. He was no fool. He was certainly not ignorant of life. But he preserved intact a delightful freshness that often seemed to partake of innocence.

And he worked, as he expressed it, "like the devil."

Charmian, genuinely liking him, but also seeing his possibilities as a lever, or weapon, was delightful to him. Claude also took to him at once. The song seemed to link them all together happily. Very soon Alston was almost as one of the Heath family. He came perpetually to the studio to "try things over." He brought various American friends there. He ate improvised meals there at odd times, Charmian acting as cook. He had even slept there more than once, when they had been making music very late. And Charmian had had a bed put on the platform behind the screen, and called it "the Prophet's chamber."

This young and determined enthusiast had a power of

flooding others with his atmosphere. He flooded Claude with it. And his ambition made his atmosphere what it was. Here was another who meant to "produce the goods."

Never before had Claude come closely in contact with the vigor, with the sharply cut ideals, of the new world. He began to see many things in a new way, to see some things which he had never perceived before. Among them he saw the fine side of ambition. He respected Alston's determination to win out, to justify his conduct in his father's eyes, and pay back to Mr. Crayford with interest all he had received from that astute, yet not unimaginative, man. He loved the lad for his eagerness. When Alston came to Renwick Place a wind from the true Bohemia seemed to blow through the studio, and the day seemed young and golden.

Yet Alston, quite ignorantly, did harm to Claude. For he helped to win Claude away from his genuine, his inner self, to draw him into the path which he had always instinctively avoided until his marriage with Charmian.

Although unspoiled, Alston Lake had not been unaffected by Paris, which had done little harm to his morals, but which had decidedly influenced his artistic sensibility. The brilliant city had not smirched his soul, but it had helped to form his taste. That was very modern, and very un-British. Alston had a sort of innocent love for the strange and the complex in music. He shrank from anything banal, and disliked the obvious, though his contact with French people had saved him from love of the cloudy. As he intended to make his career upon the stage, and as he was too young, and far too enthusiastic, not to be a bit of an egoist, he was naturally disposed to think that all real musical development was likely to take place in the direction of opera.

"Opera's going to be the big proposition!" was his art cry. There was no doubt of Jacob Crayford's influence upon him.

He was the first person who turned Claude's mind seriously toward opera, and therefore eventually toward a villa in Algeria.

Having launched the song with success, Alston Lake

naturally wished to hear more of Claude's music. Claude played to him a great deal of it. He was interested in it, admired it. But—and here his wholly unconscious egoism came into play—he did not quite "believe in it." And his lack of belief probably emanated from the fact that Claude's settings of words from the Bible were not well suited to his own temperament, talent, or training. Being very frank, and already devoted to Claude, he said straight out what he thought. Charmian loved him almost for expressing her secret belief. She now said what she thought. Claude, the reserved and silent recluse of a few months ago, was induced by these two to come out into the open and take part in the wordy battles which rage about art. The instant success of his song took away from him an excuse which he might otherwise have made, when Charmian and Alston Lake urged him to compose with a view to pleasing the public taste; by which they both meant the taste of the cultivated public which was now becoming widely diffused, and which had acquired power. He could not say that his talent was one which had no appeal to the world, that he was incapable of pleasing. One song was nothing. So he declared. Charmian and Alston Lake in their enthusiasm elevated it into a great indication, lifted it up like a lamp till it seemed to shed rays of light on the way in which they urged Claude to walk.

He had long abandoned his violin concerto, and had worked on a setting of the *Belle Dame Sans Merci* for soprano, chorus, and orchestra. But before it was finished—and during the season his time for work was limited, owing to the numerous social engagements in which Charmian and Alston Lake involved him—an event took place which had led directly to the packing of those boxes which now stood ready for a journey. Jacob Crayford reappeared in London after putting Europe through his sieve. And Claude was introduced to him by Alston Lake, who insisted on his patron hearing Claude's song.

Mr. Crayford did not care very much about the song. A song was not a big proposition, and he was accustomed to think in operas. But his fondness for Lake, and Lake's

boyish enthusiasm for Claude, led him to pay some attention to the latter. He was a busy man and did not waste much time. But he was a sharp man and a man on the look-out for talent. Apparently this Claude Heath had some talent, not much developed perhaps as yet. But then he was young. In Claude's appearance and personality there was something arresting. "Looks as if there might be something there," was Crayford's silent comment. And then he admired Charmian and thought her "darned cute." He openly chaffed her on her careful silence about her husband's profession when they had met at Mrs. Shiffney's. "So you wanted to know the great fighter, did you?" he said, pulling at the little beard with a nervous hand, and twitching his eyebrows. "And if he hadn't happened to have one opera house, and to be thinking about running up another, much you'd have cared about his fighting."

"My husband is not a composer of operas, Mr. Crayford," observed Charmian demurely.

From Alston Lake had come the urgent advice to Claude to try his hand on an opera.

Jacques Sennier and his wife, fresh from their triumphs in America, had come to London again in June. The *Paradis Terrestre* had been revived at Covent Garden, and its success had been even greater than before.

"Claude, you've simply got to write an opera!" Lake had said one night in his studio.

Charmian, Claude, and he had all been at Covent Garden that night, and had dropped in, as they sometimes did, at the studio to spend an hour on their way home. Lake loved the studio, and if there were any question of his going either there or to the house in Kensington, he always "plumped for the studio." They "sat around" now, eating sandwiches and drinking lemonade and whisky-and-soda, and discussing the events of the evening.

"I couldn't possibly write an opera," Claude said.

"Why not?"

"I have no bent toward the theater."

Alston Lake, who was long-limbed, very blond, clean-

shaved, with gray eyes, extraordinarily smooth yellow hair, and short, determined and rather blunt features, stretched out one large hand to the cigar-box, and glanced at Charmian.

"What is your bent toward?" he said, in his strong and ringing baritone voice.

Claude's forehead puckered, and the sudden distressed look, which Mrs. Mansfield had sometimes noticed, came into his eyes.

"Well—" he began, in a hesitating voice. "I hardly know—now."

"Now, old chap?"

"I mean I hardly know."

"Then for all you can tell it may be toward opera?" said Alston triumphantly.

Charmian touched the wreath of green leaves which shone in her dark hair. Her face had grown more decisive of late. She looked perhaps more definitely handsome, but she looked just a little bit harder. She glanced at her husband, glanced away, and lit a cigarette. That evening she had again seen Madame Sennier, had noticed, with a woman's almost miraculous sharpness, the crescendo in the Frenchwoman's formerly dominant personality. She puffed out a tiny ring of pale smoke and said nothing. It seemed to her that Alston was doing work for her.

"I don't think it is," Claude said, after a pause. "I'm twenty-nine, and up to now I've never felt impelled to write anything operatic."

"That's probably because you haven't been in the way of meeting managers, opera singers, and conductors. Every man wants the match that fires him."

"That's just what I think," said Charmian.

Claude smiled. In the recent days he had heard so much talk about music and musicians. And he had noticed that Alston and his wife were nearly always in agreement.

"What was the match that fired you, Alston?" he asked, looking at the big lad—he looked little more than a lad—good-naturedly.

"Well, I always wanted to sing, of course. But I think it was Crayford."

He puffed almost furiously at his cigar.

"Crayford's a marvellous man. He'll lick the Metropolitan crowd yet. He's going to make me."

"You mean you're going to make yourself?" interrupted Claude.

"Takes two to do it!"

Again he looked over to Charmian.

"Without Crayford I should never have believed I could be a big opera singer. As it is, I mean to be. And, what is more, I know I shall be. Now, Claude, old fellow, don't get on your hind legs, but just listen to me. Every man needs help when he's a kid, needs somebody who knows—*knows*, mind you—to put him in the right way. What is wanted nowadays is operatic stuff, first-rate operatic stuff. Now, look here, I'm going to speak out straight, and that's all there is to it. I wanted Crayford to hear your big things"—Claude shifted in his chair, stretched out his legs and drew them up—"I told him about them and how strong they were. 'What subjects does he treat?' he said. I told him. At least, I began to tell him. 'Oh, Lord!' he said, stopping me on the nail—but you know how busy he is. He can't waste time. And he's out for the goods, you know—'Oh, Lord!' he said. 'Don't bother me with the Bible. The time for oratorio has gone to join Holy Moses!' I tried to explain that your stuff was no more like old-fashioned oratorio than Chicago is like Stratford-on-Avon, but he wouldn't listen. All he said was, 'Gone to join Holy Moses, my boy! Tell that chap Heath to bring me a good opera and I'll make him more famous than Sennier. For I know how to run him, or any man that can produce the goods, twice as well as Sennier's run.' There, old chap! I've given it you straight. Look what a success we've had with the song!"

"And *I* found him that!" Charmian could not help saying quickly.

"Find him a first-rate libretto, Mrs. Charmian! I'll tell you what, I know a lot of fellows in Paris who write. Suppose you and I run over to Paris—"

"Would you let me, Claudie?" she interrupted.

"Oh!" he said, laughing, but without much mirth. "Do whatever you like, my children. You make me feel as if I know nothing about myself, nothing at all."

"Weren't you one of the best orchestral pupils at the Royal College?" said Alston. "Didn't you win—?"

"Go—go to Paris and bring me back a libretto!" he exclaimed, assuming a mock despair.

He did not reckon with Charmian's determination. He had taken it all as a kind of joke. But when, at the end of the season, he suggested a visit to Cornwall to see his people, Charmian said:

"You go! And I'll take Susan Fleet as a chaperon and run over to Paris with Alston Lake."

"What—to find the libretto? But there's no one in Paris in August."

"Leave that to us," she answered with decision.

Claude still felt as if the whole thing were a sort of joke. But he let his wife go. And she came back with a very clever and powerful libretto, written by a young Algerian who knew Arab life well, and who had served for a time with the Foreign Legion. Claude read it carefully, then studied it minutely. The story interested him. The plot was strong. There were wonderful opportunities for striking scenic effects. But the whole thing was entirely "out of his line." And he told Charmian and Lake so.

"It would need to be as Oriental in the score as *Louise* is French," he said. "And what do I know—"

"Go and get it!" interrupted Lake. "Nothing ties you to London. Spend a couple of years over it, if you like. It would be worth it. And Crayford says there's going to be a regular 'boom' in Eastern things in a year or two."

"Now how can he possibly know that?" said Claude.

"My boy, he does know it. Crayford knows everything. He looks ahead, by Jove! Fools don't know what the people want. Clever men do know what they want. And Crayfords know what they're going to want."

And now the Heath's boxes were actually packed, and the great case of scores stood in the hall in Berkeley Square.

As Claude looked at it he felt like one who had burnt his boats.

Ever since he had decided that he would "have a try at opera," as Alston Lake expressed it, he had been studying orchestration assiduously in London with a brilliant master. For nearly three months he had given all his working time to this. His knowledge of orchestration had already been considerable, even remarkable. But he wanted to be sure of all the most modern combinations. He had toiled with a pertinacity, a tireless energy that had astonished his "coach." But the driving force behind him was not what it had been when he worked alone in the long and dark room, with the dim oil-paintings and the orange-colored curtains. Then he had been sent on by the strange force which lives and perpetually renews itself in a man's own genius, when he is at the work he was sent into the world to do. Now he had scourged himself on by a self-consciously exercised force of will. He had set his teeth. He had called upon all the dogged pertinacity which a man must have if he is to be really a man among men. Always, far before him in the distance which must some day be gained, gleamed the will-o'-the-wisp lamp of success. He had an object now, which must never be forgotten, success. What had been his object when he toiled in Mullion House? He had scarcely known that he had any object in working—in giving up. But, if he had, it was surely the thing itself. He had desired to create a certain thing. Once the thing was created he had passed on to something else.

Sometimes now he looked back on that life of his, and it seemed very strange, very far away. A sort of halo of faint and caressing light surrounded it; but it seemed a thing rather vague, almost a thing of dreams. The life he was entering now was not vague, nor dreamlike, but solid, firmly planted, rooted in intention. He read the label attached to the case of scores: "Claude Heath, passenger to Algiers, via Marseilles." And he could scarcely believe he was really going.

As he looked up from the label he saw the post lying on

the hall-table. Two letters for him, and—ah, some more cuttings from Romeike and Curtice. He was quite accustomed to getting those now. "That dreadful Miss Gretch" had infected others with her disease of comment, and his name was fairly often in the papers.

"Mr. and Mrs. Claude Heath are about to leave their charming and artistic house in Kensington and to take up their residence near Algiers. It is rumored that there is an interesting reason, not wholly unconnected with things operatic, for their departure, etc."

Charmian had been at work even in these last busy days. Her energy was wonderful. Claude considered it for a moment as he stood in the hall. Energy and will, she had both, and she had made him feel them. She had become quite a personage. She was certainly a very devoted wife, devoted to what she called, and what no doubt everyone else would call, his "interests." And yet—and yet—

Claude knew that he did not love her. He admired her. He had become accustomed to her. He felt her force. He knew he ought to be very grateful to her for many things. She was devoted to him. Or was she—was she not rather devoted to his "interests," to those nebulous attendants that hover round a man like shadows in the night? How would it be in Algiers when they were quite alone together?

He sighed, looked once more at the label, and went upstairs.

He found Mrs. Mansfield there alone, reading beside the fire.

She had not been very well, and her face looked thinner than usual, her eyes more intense and burning. She was dressed in white.

As Claude came in she laid down her book and turned to him. He thought she looked very sad.

"Charmian still out, Madre?" he asked.

"Yes. Dressmakers hold hands with eternity, I think."

"Tailors don't, thank Heaven!"

He sat down on the other side of the fire, and they were both silent for a moment.

"You're coming to see us in spring?" Claude said, lifting his head.

Sadness seemed to flow from Mrs. Mansfield to him, to be enveloping him. He disliked, almost feared, silence just then.

"If you want me."

"If!"

"I'm not quite sure that you will."

Their eyes met. Claude looked away. Did he really wish Madre to come out into that life? Had she pierced down to a reluctance in him of which till that moment he had scarcely been aware?

"We shall see," she said, more lightly. "Susan Fleet is going out, I know, after Christmas, when Adelaide Shiffney goes off to India."

"Yes, she has promised Charmian to come. And Lake will visit us too."

"Naturally. Will you see him in Paris on your way through?"

"Oh, yes! What an enthusiast he is!"

Claude sighed.

"I shall miss you, Madre," he said, somberly almost. "I am so accustomed to be within reach of you."

"I hope you will miss me a little. But the man who never leans heavily never falls when the small human supports we all use now and then are withdrawn. You love me, I know. But you don't need me."

"Then do you think I never lean heavily?"

"Do you?"

He moved rather uneasily.

"I—I don't know that it is natural to me to lean. Still—still we sometimes do things, get into the habit of doing things, which are not natural to us."

"That's a mistake, I think, unless we do them from a fine motive, from unselfishness, for instance, from the motive of honor, or to strengthen our wills drastically. But I believe we have been provided with a means of knowing how far we ought to pursue a course not wholly natural to us."

"What means?"

"If the at first apparently unnatural thing soon seems quite natural to us, if it becomes, as it were, part of ourselves,

if we can incorporate it with ourselves, then we have probably made a step upward. But if it continues to seem persistently unnatural, I think we are going downward. I am one of those who believe in the power called conscience. But I expect you knew that already. Here is Charmian!"

Charmian came in, flushed with the cold outside, her long eyes sparkling, her hands deep in a huge muff.

"Sitting with Madre, Claude!"

"I have been telling her we expect her to come to us in spring."

"Of course we do. That's settled. I found these cuttings in the hall."

She drew one hand out of her muff. It was holding the newspaper slips of Romeike and Curtice.

"They find out almost everything about us," she said, in her clear, slightly authoritative voice. "But we shall soon escape from them. A year—two years, perhaps—out of the world! It will be a new experience for me, won't it, Madretta?"

"Quite new."

The expression in her eyes changed as she looked at Claude.

"And I shall see the island with you."

"The island?" he said.

"Don't you remember—the night I came back from Algiers, and you dined here with Madre and me, I told you about a little island I had seen in an Algerian garden? I remember the very words I said that night, about the little island wanting me to make people far away feel it, know it. But I couldn't, because I had no genius to draw in color, and light, and sound, and perfume, and to transform them, and give them out again, better than the truth, because *I* was added to them. Don't you remember, Claudie?"

"Yes, now I remember."

"You are going to do that where I could not do it."

Claude glanced at Mrs. Mansfield.

And again he felt as if he were enveloped by a sadness that flowed from her.

CHAPTER XIX

CHARMIAN and her husband went first to the Hôtel St. George at Mustapha Supérieur above Algiers. But they had no intention of remaining there for more than two or three weeks. Claude could not compose happily in a hotel. And they wished to be economical. As Claude had not yet given up the studio, they still had expenses in London. And the house in Kensington Square was only let on a six months' lease. They had no money to throw away.

During the first few days after their arrival Claude did not think of work. He tried to give himself up to the new impressions that crowded in upon him in Northern Africa. Charmian eagerly acted as cicerone. That spoiled things sometimes for Claude, but he did not care to say so to his wife. So he sent that secret to join the many secrets which, carefully kept from her, combined to make a sort of subterranean life running its course in the darkness of his soul.

In addition to being a cicerone Charmian was a woman full of purpose. And she was seldom able, perhaps indeed she feared, to forget this. The phantom of Madame Sennier, white-faced, red-haired, determined, haunted her. She and Claude were not as other people, who had come from England or elsewhere to Algiers. They had an "object." They must not waste their time. Claude was to be "steeped" in the atmosphere necessary for the production of his Algerian opera. Almost a little anxiously, certainly with a definiteness rather destructive, Charmian began the process of "steeping" her husband.

She thought that she concealed her intention from Claude. She had sufficient knowledge of his character to realize that he might be worried if he thought that he was being taken too firmly in hand. She honestly wished to be delicate with him, even to be very subtle. But she was so keenly, so incessantly

alive to the reason of their coming to Africa, she was so determined that success should result from their coming, that purpose, as it were, oozed out of her. And Claude was sensitive. He felt it like a cloud gathering about him, involving him to his detriment. Sometimes he was on the edge of speaking of it to Charmian. Sometimes he was tempted to break violently away from all his precautions, to burst out from secrecy, and to liberate his soul.

But a voice within him held him back. It whispered: "It is too late now. You should have done it long ago when you were first married, when first she began to assert herself in your art life."

And he kept silence.

Perhaps if he had been thoroughly convinced of the nature of Charmian's love for him, he would even now have spoken. But he could not banish from him grievous doubts as to the quality of her affection.

She devoted herself to him. She was concentrated upon him, too concentrated for his peace. She was ready to give up things for him, as she had just given up her life and her friends in England. But why? Was it because she loved him, the man? Or was there another—a not completely hidden reason?

Charmian and he went together to see the little island. The owner of the garden in which it stood, with its tiny lake around it, was absent in England. The old Arab house was closed. But the head gardener, a Frenchman, who had spent a long life in Algeria, remembered Charmian, and begged her to wander wherever she pleased. She took Claude to the edge of the lake, and drew him down beside her on a white seat.

And presently she said:

"Claudie, it was here I first knew I should marry you."

Claude, who had been looking in silence at the water, the palm, and the curving shores covered with bamboos, flowering shrubs, and trees, turned on the seat and looked at her.

"Knew that you would marry me!" he said.

Something in his eyes almost startled her.

"I mean I felt as if Fate meant to unite us."

He still gazed at her with the strange expression in his eyes, an expression which made her feel almost uneasy.

"Something here"—she almost faltered, called on her will, and continued—"something here seemed to tell me that I should come here some day with you. Wasn't it strange?"

Well, yes, I suppose it was," he answered.

She thought his voice sounded insincere.

"I almost wonder," he added, "that you did not suggest our coming here for our honeymoon."

"I thought of it. I wanted to."

"Then why didn't you?"

"I felt as if the right time had not come, as if I had to wait."

"And now the right time has come?"

"Yes, now it has come."

She tried to speak with energy. But her voice sounded doubtful. That curious look in his eyes had filled her with an unwonted indecision, had troubled her spirit.

The old gardener, who had white whiskers and narrow blue eyes, came down the path under the curving pergola, carrying a bunch of white and red roses in his earthy hand.

He presented it to Charmian with a bow. A young Arab, who helped in the garden, showed for a moment among the shrubs on the hillside. Claude saw him, followed him with the eyes of one strange in Africa till he was hidden, watched for his reappearance. Charmian got up. The gardener spoke in a hoarse voice, telling her something about water-plants and blue lilies, of which there were some in the garden, and of which he seemed very proud. She glanced at Claude, then walked a few steps with the old man and began to talk with him.

It seemed to her that Claude had fallen into a dream.

That day, when Charmian rejoined Claude, she said:

"Old Robert has spoken to me of a villa."

"Old Robert!"

"The gardener. We are intimate friends. He has told me a thousand things about Algeria, his life in the army, his family. But what interests me—us—is that he knows of a villa to be let by the year, Djenan-el-Maqui. It is old but in

good repair, pure Arab in style, so he says, and only eighty pounds a year. Of course it is quite small. But there is a garden. And it is only some ten or twelve minutes from here in the best part of Mustapha Inférieur. Shall we go and look at it now?"

"Isn't it rather late?"

"Then to-morrow," she said quickly.

"Yes, let us go to-morrow."

Djenan-el-Maqui proved to be suited to the needs of Charmian and Claude, and it charmed them both by its strangeness and beauty. It lay off the high road, to the left of the Boulevard Brou, a little way down the hill; and though there were many villas near it, and from its garden one could look over the town, and see cavalry exercising on the Champs de Manœuvres, which shows like a great brown wound in the fairness of the city, it suggested secrecy, retirement, and peace, as only old Oriental houses can. Around it was a high white wall, above which the white flat-roofed house showed itself, its serene line broken by two tiny white cupolas and by one upstanding and lonely chamber built on the roof. On passing through a doorway, which was closed by a strong wooden door, the Heaths found themselves in a small paved courtyard, which was roofed with bougainvillea, and provided with stone benches and a small stone table. The sun seemed to drip through the interstices of the bright-colored ceiling and made warm patches on the worn gray stone. The house, with its thick white walls, and windows protected by grilles, confronted them, holding its many secrets.

"We must have it, Claude," Charmian almost whispered.

"But we haven't even seen it!" he retorted, smiling.

"I know it will do."

She was right. Soon Claude loved it even more than she did; loved its mysterious pillared drawing-room with the small white arches, the faint-colored and ancient Moorish tiles, the divans strewn with multi-colored cushions, the cabinets and tables of lacquer work, and the low-set windows about which the orange-hued venusta hung; the gallery running right round it from which the few small bedrooms

opened by low black doors; the many nooks and recesses where, always against a background of colored tiles, more divans and tiny coffee tables suggested repose and the quiet of dreaming. He delighted in the coolness and the curious silence of this abode, which threw the mind far back into a past when the Arab was a law unto himself and to his household, when he dreamed in what he thought full liberty, when Europe concerned him not. And most of all he liked his own work-room, though this was an addition to the house, and had been made by a French painter who had been a former tenant. This was the chamber built upon the roof, which formed a flat terrace in front of it, commanding a splendid view over the town, the bay, Cap Matifou, and the distant range of the Atlas. Moorish tiles decorated the walls to a height of some three feet, tiles purple, white, and a watery green. Above them was a cream-colored distemper. At the back of the room, opposite to the French window which opened on to the roof, was an arched recess some four feet narrower than the rest of the room, ornamented with plaques of tiles, and delicate lacelike plaster-work above low windows which came to within a foot and a half of the floor. A brass Oriental lamp with white, green, and yellow beads hung in the archway. An old carpet woven at Kairouan before the time of aniline dyes was spread over the floor. White and green curtains, and furniture covered in white and green, harmonized with the tiles and the white and cream plaster. Through the windows could be seen dark cypress trees, the bright blue of the sea, the white and faint red of the crowding houses of the town.

It was better than the small chamber in Kensington Square, better than the studio in Renwick Place.

"I ought to be able to work here!" Claude thought.

The small inner Arab court, with its fountain, its marble basin containing three gold-fish, its roofed-in coffee-chamber, the little dining-room separated from the rest of the house, pleased them both. And Charmian took the garden, which ran rather wild, and was full of geraniums, orange trees, fig trees, ivy growing over old bits of wall, and untrained rose bushes, into her special charge.

Their household seemed likely to be a success. As cook they had an astonishingly broad-bosomed Frenchwoman, whom they called "La Grande Jeanne," and who immediately settled down like a sort of mother of the house; a tall, thin, and birdlike Frenchman named Pierre, who had been a soldier, and then for several years a servant at the Trappist Monastery at Staouëli; Charmian's maid; and an Arab boy whom everyone called Bibi, and who alternated between a demeanor full of a graceful and apparently fatalistic languor, and fits of almost monkeylike gaiety and mischief which Pierre strove to repress. A small Arab girl, dressed like a little woman in flowing cotton or muslin, with clinking bracelets and anklets, charms on her thin bosom and scarlet and yellow silk handkerchiefs on her braided hair, was also perpetually about the house and the courtyard. Neither Charmian nor Claude ever quite understood what had first led little Fatma there. She was some relation of Bibi's, had always known La Grande Jeanne, and seemed in some vague way to belong to the ancient house. Very soon they would have missed her had she gone. She was gentle, dignified, eternally picturesque. The courtyard roofed in by the bougainvillea would have seemed sad and deserted without her.

Charmian had come away from England with enthusiasm, intent on the future. Till their departure life had been busy and complicated. She had had a thousand things to do, quantities of people to see; friends to whom she must say good-bye, acquaintances, dressmakers, modistes, tailors. Claude had been busy, too. He had been working at his orchestration for hours every day. Charmian had never interrupted him. It was her rôle to keep him to his work if he showed signs of flagging. But he had never shown such signs. London had hummed around them with its thousand suggestive voices; hinting, as if without intention and because it could not do otherwise, at a myriad interests, activities, passions. The great city had kept their minds, and even, so it seemed to Charmian and to Claude sometimes now in Africa, their hearts occupied. Now they confronted a solitary life in a strange country, in a *milieu* where they had no friends, no acquaint-

ances even, except two or three casually met in the Hôtel St. George, and the British Consul-General and his wife, who had been to call on them.

Quietude, a curious sort of emptiness, seemed to descend upon them during those first days in the villa. Even Charmian felt rather "flat." She was conscious of the romance of their situation in this old Arab house, looking out over trees to the bright-blue sea. But when she had carefully arranged and re-arranged the furniture, settled on the places for the books, put flowers in the vases, and had several talks with Jeanne, she was acutely aware of a certain vagueness, a certain almost overpowering oddity. She felt rather like a person who has done in a great hurry something she did not really want to do, and who understands her true feeling abruptly.

In the course of years she had become so accustomed to the routine of a full life, a life charged with incessant variety of interests, occupations, amusements, a life offering day after day "something to look forward to," and teeming with people whom she knew, that she now confronted weeks, months even, of solitude with Claude almost in fear. He had his work. She had never been a worker in what she considered the real sense, that is a creator striving to "arrive." She conceived of such work as filling the worker's whole life. She knew it must be so, for she had read many lives of great men. Claude, therefore, had his life in Mustapha filled up to the brim for him. But what was she going to do?

Claude, on his part, was striving to recapture in Africa the desire for popularity, the longing for fame, the wish to give people what they wanted of him in art, which he had sometimes felt of late in London. But now there were about him no people who knew anything of his art or of him. The cries of cultivated London had faded out of his ears. In Africa he felt strongly the smallness of that world, the insignificance of every little world. His true and indifferent self seemed to gather strength. He fought it. He felt that it would be a foe to the contemplated opera. He wished Alston Lake were with them, or someone who would "wake him up." Charmian, in her present condition, lacked the force which he had often

felt in London, a force which had often secretly irritated and troubled him, but which had not been without tonic properties.

With very great difficulty, with a heavy reluctance of which he was ashamed, he exerted his will, he forced himself to begin the appointed task. With renewed and anxious attention he re-studied the libretto. He laid out his music-paper, closed his door, and hoped for a stirring of inspiration, or at least of some power within him which would enable him to make a start. By experience he knew that once he was in a piece of work something helped him, often drove him. He must get to that something. He recalled those dreadful first days in Kensington Square, when he read Carlyle's *French Revolution* and sometimes felt criminal. There must be nothing of that kind here. And, thank Heaven, this was not Kensington Square. Peace and beauty were here. All the social ties were broken. If he could not compose an opera here it was certain that he could never compose one anywhere. As inspiration was slow in coming he began to write almost at haphazard, uncritically, carelessly. "I will do a certain amount every day," he said to himself, "whether I feel inclined to or not."

Inevitably, as the days went by, he and Charmian grew more at ease in, more accustomed to, the new way of life. They fell into habits of living. Claude was at last beginning to "feel" his opera. The complete novelty of his task puzzled him, put a strain on his nerves and his brain. But at the same time it roused perforce his intellectual activities. Even the tug at his will which he was obliged frequently to give, seemed to strengthen certain fibers of his intellect. This opera was not going to be easy in its coming. But it must, it should come!

Charmian decided to take up a course of reading and wrote to Susan Fleet, who was in London, begging her to send out a series of books on theosophical practice and doctrine suitable to a totally ignorant inquirer. Charmian chose to take a course of reading on theosophy simply because of her admiration and respect for Susan Fleet. Ever since she had known Susan, and made that confession to her, she had been "going" to read something about the creed which seemed to make Susan so happy and so attractive. But she had never found the time. At length the opportunity presented itself.

Susan Fleet sent out a parcel of manuals by Annie Besant and Leadbeater, among them *The Astral Plane, Reincarnation, Death—and After?* and *The Seven Principles of Man.* She also sent bigger books by Sinnet, Blavatsky, and Steiner. But she advised Charmian to begin with the manuals, and to read slowly, and only a little at a time. Susan was no propagandist, but she was a sensible woman. She hated "scamping." If Charmian were in earnest she had best be put in the right way. The letter which accompanied the books was long and calmly serious. When Charmian had read it she felt almost alarmed at the gravity of the task which she had chosen to confront. It had been easy to have energy for Claude in London. She feared it would be less easy to have energy for herself in Mustapha. But she resolved not to shrink back now. Rather vaguely she imagined that through theosophy lay the path to serenity and patience. Just now—indeed, for a long time to come, she needed, would need above all things, patience. In calm must be made the long preparations for that which some day would fill her life and Claude's with excitement, with glory, with the fever of fame. For the first time she really understood something of the renunciation which must make up so large a part of every true artist's life. Sometimes she wondered what Madame Sennier's life had been while Jacques Sennier was composing *Le Paradis Terrestre,* how long he had taken in the creation of that stupendous success. Then resolutely she turned to her little manuals.

She had begun with *The Seven Principles of Man.* The short preface had attracted her. "Life easier to bear—death easier to face." If theosophy helped men and women to the finding of that its value was surely inestimable. Charmian was not obsessed by any dark thoughts of death. But she considered that she knew quite well the weight of time's burden in life. She needed help to make the waiting easier. For sometimes, when she was sitting alone, the prospect seemed almost intolerable. The crowded Opera House, the lights, the thunder of applause, the fixed attention of the world—they were all so far away.

Resolutely she read *The Seven Principles of Man.*

Then she dipped into *Reincarnation* and *Death—and After?* Although she did not at all fully understand much of what she read, she received from these three books two dominant impressions. One was of illimitable vastness, the other of an almost horrifying smallness. She read, re-read, and, for the moment, that is when she was shut in alone with the books, her life with Claude presented itself to her like a mote in space. Of what use was it to concentrate, to strive, to plan, to renounce, to build as if for eternity, if the soul were merely a rapid traveller, passing hurriedly on from body to body, as a feverish and unsatisfied being, homeless and alone, passes from hotel to hotel? Were she and Claude only joined together for a moment? She tried to realize thoroughly the theosophical attitude of mind, to force herself to regard her existence with Claude from the theosophical standpoint—as, say, Mrs. Besant might, probably must, regard her life with anyone. She certainly did not succeed in this effort. But she attained to a sort of nightmare conception of the futility of passing relations with other hurrying lives. And she tried to imagine herself alone without Claude in her life.

Instantly her mind began to concern itself with Claude's talent, and she began to imagine herself without her present aim in her life.

One day while she was doing this she heard the distant sound of a piano above her. Claude was playing over a melody which he had just composed for the opening scene of the opera. Charmian got up, went to the window, leaned out, and listened. And immediately the nightmare sensation dropped from her. She was, or felt as if she were, conscious of permanence, stability. Her connection with that man above her, who was playing upon the piano, suddenly seemed durable, almost as if it would be everlasting. Claude was "her man," his talent belonged to her. She could not conceive of herself deprived of them, of her life without them.

Early in the New Year the Heaths received a visit from Armand Gillier, the writer of Claude's libretto. He had come over from Paris to see his family, who lived at St. Eugene. Charmian had met him in Paris, but Claude had never seen

him, though he had corresponded with him, and sent him a cheque of £100 for his work.

Armand Gillier was a small, rather square built man of thirty-two, with a very polite manner and a decidedly brusque mind. His face was handsome, with a straight nose, strong jaw, and large, widely opened, and very expressive dark eyes. A vigorous and unusually broad moustache curled upward above his sensual mouth. And the dark hair which closely covered his well-shaped head was drenched with eau de quinine.

Gillier was not a gentleman. His father was a small vine-grower and cultivator, who had been rather disgusted by the fugues of his eldest son, but who was now resigned to the latter's *étranges folies*. The fact that Armand, after preposterously joining the Foreign Legion, and then preposterously leaving it, had actually been paid a hundred pounds down for a piece of literary work, had made his father have some hopes of him.

When he arrived at Djenan-el-Maqui Claude was at work, and Charmian recieved him. She was delighted to have such a visitor. Here was a denizen of the real Bohemia, and one who, by the strange ties of ambition, was closely connected with Claude and herself. She sat with the writer in the cool and secretive drawing-room, smoking cigarettes with him, and preparing him for Claude.

This man must "fire" Claude.

Gillier had been born and brought up in Algeria. All that was strange to the Heaths was commonplace to him. But he had an original and forcible mind and a keen sense of the workings of environment and circumstance upon humanity. At first he was very polite and formal, a mere bundle of good manners. But under Charmian's carefully calculated influence, he changed. He perhaps guessed what her object was, guessed that success for him might be involved in it. And, suddenly abandoning his formality, he exclaimed:

"*Eh bien*, madame! And of what nature is your husband?"

Charmian looked at him and hesitated.

"Is he bold, strong, fierce, open-hearted? Has he lived, loved, and suffered? Or is he gentle, closed, retiring, subtle,

morbid perhaps? Does he live in the dreams of his soul, in the twilight of his beautiful imaginings?"

Lifting his rather coarse and powerful hands to his moustache, he pulled at the upward-pointing ends.

"I wish to know this," he exclaimed. "Because it is important for me. My libretto was written by one who has lived, and the man who sets it to music must have lived also to do it justice."

There was a fierceness, characteristic of Algerians of a certain class, in his manner now that he had got rid of his first formality.

Charmian felt slightly embarrassed. At that moment she hoped strongly that her husband would not come down. For the first time she realized the gulf fixed between Claude and the libretto which she had found for him. But he must bridge that gulf out here. She looked hard at this short, brusque, and rather violent young man. Armand Gillier must help Claude to bridge that gulf.

"Take another cigarette. I'll tell you about my husband," she said.

CHAPTER XX

MRS SHIFFNEY, who was perpetually changing her mind in the chase after happiness, changed it about India. After all the preparations had been made, innumerable gowns and hats had been bought, a nice party had been arranged, and the yacht had been "sent round" to Naples, she decided that she did not want to go, had never wanted to go. Whether the defection of a certain Spanish ex-diplomat, who was to have been among the guests, had anything to do with her sudden dislike of "that boresome India," perhaps only she knew, and the ex-diplomat guessed. The whole thing was abruptly given up, and January found her in Grosvenor Square, much disgusted with her persecution by Fate, and wondering what on earth was to become of her.

In such crises she generally sent for Susan Fleet, if the theosophist were within reach. She now decided to telegraph to Folkestone, where Susan was staying in lodgings not far from the house of dear old Mrs. Simpkins. Susan replied that she would come up on the following day, and she duly arrived just before the hour of lunch.

She found Mrs. Shiffney dressed to go out.

"Oh, Susan, what a mercy to see you! We are going to the Ritz. We shall be by ourselves. I want you to advise me what to do. Things have got so mixed up. Is the motor there?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then."

At the Ritz, although she met many acquaintances, Mrs. Shiffney would not join any one for lunch or let any one join her.

"Susan and I have important matters to discuss," she said, smiling.

Her face and manner had completely changed directly she got out of the motor. She now looked radiant, like one for

whom life held nothing but good things. And all the time she and Susan were lunching and talking she preserved a radiant demeanor. Her reward was that everyone said how handsome Adelaide Shiffney was looking. She even succeeded in continuing to look handsome when she found that Susan had made private plans for the immediate future.

"I've promised to go to Algiers," Susan said over the *œufs en cocotte*, when Mrs. Shiffney asked what was to be done to make things lively.

"To Algiers! Why? What is there to do there? You know it inside out."

"Scarcely that. I'm going to stay with Charmian Heath."

Mrs. Shiffney's large mouth suddenly looked a little hard, though her general expression hardly altered.

"Oh! Whereabouts are they?"

"Up at Mustapha, not far from Mrs. Graham."

"They say he's trying to write an opera. Poor fellow! The very last thing he could do, I should think. But she pushes him on. Since that song of his—I forget the name, heart something or other—her head has been completely turned about his talent. The fact is, Susan, Sennier's sudden fame has turned all their heads, the young composers, *les jeunes*, you know. They are all trying to write operas. In Paris it's too absurd! But an Englishman, with his temperament, too—Oliver Cromwell in Harris tweed!—she must be mad. Of course even if he ever finishes it he will never get it produced."

Susan quietly went on eating her eggs.

"A totally unknown man. She thinks that song has made him quite a celebrity. But nobody has ever heard of him."

"Nobody had ever heard of Sennier till that night at Covent Garden," observed Susan, lifting a glass of water to her lips.

"Oh, yes, they had!"

Mrs. Shiffney's musical passion for Sennier often led her to embroider facts.

"Among the people who matter in Paris he was quite famous."

"Oh, I didn't know that," said Susan, without a trace of doubt or of sarcasm.

"How could you? Besides, Sennier is a great man, the only man we have, in fact. So you were going to stay with the Heaths?"

"I am going. I promised Charmian Heath."

"When?"

"In about ten days, I think. My mother is rather unwell, only a bad cold. But I like to be at Folkestone to help Mrs. Simpkins."

"Susan, what an extraordinary person you are!"

"Why?"

"You are. But you are so extraordinary that I could never make you see why. Sandringham and Mrs. Simpkins! There is no one like you."

She branched off to various topics, but presently returned to the Algerian visit.

"What do you think of Charmian Heath, Susan—really think, I mean? Do you care for her?"

"Yes, I do."

"Oh, I don't mean as a theosophist, I mean as a human being."

Susan smiled. "We are human beings."

"You are certainly. But, of course, I know you embrace Charmian Heath with your universal love, just as you embrace me and Mrs. Simpkins and the King and the crossing-sweeper at the corner. That doesn't interest me. I wish to know whether you like her as you don't like me and the King and the crossing-sweeper?"

"Charmian Heath and I are good friends. I am interested in her."

"In a woman!"

"Greatly because she is a woman."

"I know you're a suffragette at heart!"

They talked a little about politics. When coffee came, Mrs. Shiffney suddenly said:

"I'll take you over to Algiers, Susan."

"But you don't want to go there."

"It's absurd your going in one of those awful steamers

from Marseilles when the yacht is only about half an hour away."

"Half an hour! I thought she was at Naples."

"I said *about* half an hour on purpose to be accurate."

"Really, I would just as soon take the steamer," said Susan.

This definite, though very gentle, resistance to her suddenly conceived project decided Mrs. Shiffney. If Susan genuinely wished to go to Algiers by the public steamer, then she would have to go on the yacht. Mrs. Shiffney had realized from the beginning of their conversation that Susan wished to go to Algiers alone. There had been something in the tone of her voice, in her expression, her quiet manner, which had convinced Mrs. Shiffney of that. Her curiosity was awake, and something else.

"Susan dear, you must allow me to take care of you as far as Algiers," she said. "If you don't want me there I'll just put you ashore on the beach, near Cap Matifou or somewhere, and leave you there with your trunks. You are an eccentric, but that's no reason why you shouldn't have a comfortable voyage."

"Very well. It's very kind of you, Adelaide," Susan returned, without a trace of vexation.

That very day Mrs. Shiffney telegraphed to the captain of the yacht to bring her round to Marseilles. In the evening Susan Fleet returned to Folkestone.

Mrs. Shiffney did not intend to make the journey alone with Susan, and to be left "in the air" at Algiers. She must get a man or two. After a few minutes' thought she sent a message to Max Elliot asking him to look in upon her. When he came she invited him to join the party.

"You must come," she said. "Only ten days or so. Surely you can get away. And you'll see your protégé, Mr. Heath.

"My protégé!"

"Well, you were the first to discover him."

"But he's impossible. A charming fellow with undoubted talent, but so bearish about his music. I gave it up, as you know, though I'm always the Heaths' very good friend."

"Well, but his song?"

"One song! What's that? And his wife made him compose it. Nobody has ever heard his really fine work, his Te Deum, and his settings of sacred words."

"His wife and mother have, I believe."

"His wife—yes. And she will take care no one else ever does hear them now."

"Why?"

Max Elliot looked at Mrs. Shiffney. Into his big and genial eyes there came an expression of light sarcasm, almost of contempt. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Art and the world!" he said enigmatically.

"Well, but, Max, don't you represent the world in connection with the art of music?"

"I! Do I?" he said, suddenly grave.

She laughed.

"I should think so, *mon cher*. I don't believe either you or I have a right to talk!"

It was a moment of truth, and was followed, as truth often is, by a moment of silence. Then Mrs. Shiffney said:

"Claude Heath has gone to Algiers to compose an opera."

"Oh, all this opera madness is owing to the success of Jacques!"

"Of course. I know that. But another Jacques might spring up, I suppose. Henriette wouldn't like that."

"Like it!" exclaimed Max Elliot, twisting his thick lips. "She wants a clear field for the next big event. And I must say she deserves it."

"Just what I think. Well, you'll come to Algiers and hear how the new opera's getting on?"

He glanced at her determined eyes.

"Yes, I'll come. But it must be only for ten days. I've got such a lot of work on hand!"

"Perhaps I'll ask Ferdinand to come, too. Or—"

Suddenly Mrs. Shiffney leaned forward. Her face had become eager, almost excited.

"Shall I ask Henriette and Jacques to come with us? They don't go to New York this year."

Max Elliot seemed to hesitate. He was an enthusiast, and apt to be carried away by his enthusiasms, sometimes

even into absurdity. But he was a thoroughly good fellow, and had not the slightest aptitude or taste for intrigue. Mrs. Shiffney saw his hesitation.

"I will ask them," she said, "Charmian Heath will love to know them, I'm sure. She has such a fine taste in celebrities."

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On a brilliant day in the first week of February *The Wanderer* glided into the harbor of Algiers, and, like a sentient being with a discriminating brain, picked her way to her moorings. On board of her were Mrs. Shiffney, Susan Fleet, Madame Sennier, Jacques Sennier, and Max Elliot.

The composer had been very ill on the voyage. His lamentations and cries of "*Ah, mon Dieu!*" and "*O la la là!*" had been distressing. Madame Sennier had never left him. She had nursed him as if he were a child, holding his poor stomach and back in the great crises of his malady, laying him firmly on his enormous pillows when exhaustion brought a moment of respite, feeding him with a spoon and drenching him with eau de Cologne. She now gave him her arm to help him on deck, twining a muffler round his meager throat.

"It's lovely, my cabbage! You must lift the head! You must regard the jewelled Colonial crown of our beloved France!"

"*Ah, mon Dieu! O la la là!*" replied her celebrated husband.

"My little chicken, you must have courage!"

Susan Fleet had let Charmian know how she was coming, and had mentioned Mrs. Shiffney. But she had said nothing about the Senniers, for the simple reason that Adelaide had told her nothing about them until they stepped into the *wagon-lit* in Paris. Then she had remarked carelessly:

"Oh, yes, I believe they're crossing with us! Why not?"

As soon as the yacht was moored the whole party prepared to leave her. Rooms had been engaged in advance at the Hôtel St. George. And Susan Fleet was going at once to Djenan-el-Maqui.

"Tell Charmian Heath I'll look in this afternoon with

Max, Susan, about tea-time. Don't say anything about the Senniers. They won't come, I'm sure. He says he's going straight to bed directly he reaches the hotel. Charmian would be disappointed. I'll explain to her."

These were Mrs. Shiffney's last words to Susan, as she pulled down her thick white veil, opened her parasol, and stepped into the landau to drive up to the hotel. Madame Sennier was already in the carriage, where the composer lay back opposite to her with closed eyes. Even the brilliant sunshine, the soft and delicious air, the gay cries and the movement at the wharf, where many Arabs were unloading bales of goods from the ships, or were touting for employment as porters and guides, failed to rouse him.

"I must go to bed!" was his sole remark.

"My cat, you shall have the best bed in Africa and stay there for a week. Only have courage for another five minutes!" said his wife, speaking to him with the intonation of a strong-hearted mother reassuring a little child.

When Susan arrived at Djenan-el-Maqui she found Charmian there alone. Charmian greeted her eagerly, but looked at her anxiously, almost suspiciously, after the first kiss.

"Where's Adelaide? On the yacht?"

"She's gone to the Hôtel St. George."

"Oh! Close to us! How long is she going to stay? Oh, Susan, why did you let her come?"

"I couldn't help it. But why need you mind?"

"Adelaide hates me!"

"Oh, no!"

"She does. And you know it."

"I really don't think she has time to hate you, Charmian. And Adelaide can be very kind."

"Your theosophy prevents you from allowing that there are any faults in your friends. Yes, Susan, it does."

"Have you read the manuals carefully?"

"Yes, but I can't think of them now. Adelaide's being here will spoil everything."

"No it won't! She'll only stay a day or two, not that, perhaps."

"But why did she come at all?"

"She didn't tell me. She's coming to see you to-day with Mr. Elliot."

"Max Elliot, too! Of course it is Claude whom Adelaide wants to see. I quite understand that. But he's not here."

"What has become of him?"

"Susan, you know of course he wished to welcome you. He is devoted to you. But—well, the truth is"—she slightly lowered her voice, although there was no one in the room—"he had to go away for the opera. He has gone to Constantine with Armand Gillier, the author of the libretto, to study the native music there, and military life, I believe. There is a big garrison at Constantine, you know. Monsieur Gillier is a most valuable friend for Claude, and can help him tremendously in many ways; with the opera, I mean."

She stopped. Then she added:

"Adelaide Shiffney might have been of great use to Claude, too. But before we were married he offended her, I think. And now, of course, she's on the other side."

"I don't know whether I quite understand what you mean."

"She's on Sennier's side."

It seemed to Susan Fleet that Charmian was living rather prematurely in a future that was somewhat problematic. But she only said:

"Don't let us make too much of it. I hoped you might learn from the manuals not to worry. But while I'm here we can talk them over, if you like."

"Yes, yes," said Charmian, changing, melting almost into happiness. "Oh, I am glad you've come, even though it entails Adelaide for a day or two. Of course she knows about the opera?"

"Yes, she does."

"I knew." She looked into Susan's face, smiled, and concluded: "Never mind!"

At five o'clock that day the peace of Djenan-el-Maqui was broken by the sound of animated voices in the courtyard. A bell jangled and a moment later Pierre, with his most bird-like demeanor, ushered into the drawing-room Mrs. Shiffney, Madame Sennier, her husband, and Max Elliot.

"What a dear little house!" said Mrs. Shiffney, looking quickly round her with searching eyes, while they waited for their hostess. "Nothing worth twopence-halfpenny, but nothing wrong. I declare I quite envy them."

"It's charming!" said Max Elliot.

"Love in a harem! Better than in a cottage."

Madame Sennier pushed up her huge floating veil and showed her powerful face of a clown covered with white pigment. Her lips made a scarlet bar across it.

"What is she like? I remember the man. He's clever."

"Oh, she—she is charming; thin and charming."

"That's well!" observed the composer. "That's very well."

He appeared to have quite recovered from his despair, and now looked almost defiantly cheerful. Small in body, with a narrow chest and shoulders, and a weakly growing beard, he was nevertheless remarkable, even striking in appearance. His large nose suggested Semitic blood, but also power, which was shown, too, in his immense forehead and strong, energetic head. He had a habit of blinking his eyes. But they were fine eyes, full of feeling, imagination, and emotion, but also at moments full of sarcasm and shrewdness. His dark, hairy and small hands were rather monkeylike, and looked destructive.

"Every woman should be thin and charming," he continued. "The camel species, the elephant-type, the cowlike ruminating specimen—milky mother of the lowing herd, as an English poet has expressed it, and very well, too—should"—he flung out one little hairy hand vehemently—"*go* with the advance of corset-makers and civilization. She comes!"

The door had opened, and Charmian came in.

Instantly her eyes fastened on Madame Sennier.

She was so surprised that she stood still by the door, and her whole face was suffused with blood. So much had this woman meant, did she still mean in Charmian's life, that even the habit of the world did not help Charmian to complete self-control at this moment.

"I'm afraid our coming has quite startled you," said Mrs. Shiffney. "Didn't Susan tell you we were going to look in?"

"Yes, of course. I'm delighted!"

Charmian moved. She was secretly furious with herself.

Max Elliot took her hand, and Mrs. Shiffney carelessly introduced the Senniers.

"What a dear little retreat you've found here, and how deliciously you've arranged everything," she said. "You've made a perfect nest for your genius. We are all longing to see him."

They were sitting now. Charmian was on a divan beside Madame Sennier.

"A clever man!" said Madame Sennier, decisively. "I met him once at the opera. You remember, Jacques, I told you what he said about your orchestration?"

"Yes, yes, about my use of the flutes in connection with muted strings and the horns to give the effect of water."

"I want Monsieur Sennier to know him," said Mrs. Shiffney.

"I'm so sorry, but he's not here," said Charmian.

Just then Susan Fleet came in. Mrs. Shiffney turned to her.

"Susan! Such a disappointment! But, of course, you know!"

"About Mr. Heath? Yes."

"Has he gone back to England?" said Max Elliot.

"Oh, no. He's in Algeria."

Charmian obviously hesitated, saw that any want of frankness would seem extraordinary, and added:

"He has gone to Constantine with a friend."

Her voice was reluctant.

"Do have some tea!" she added quickly, pulling the bell, which Pierre promptly answered with the tea things.

"Constantine!" said Mrs. Shiffney. "That's no distance, only a night in the train. Can't you persuade him to come back and see us? Do be a dear and telegraph."

She spoke in her most airy way.

"I would in a minute. But he's not gone merely to amuse himself."

"The opera!" said Mrs. Shiffney. "By the way, is it indiscreet to ask who wrote the libretto?"

Again Charmian hesitated, and again overcame her hesitation.

"It is by a Frenchman, or rather an Algerian, French but born here. His name is Gillier."

"Armand Gillier?" exclaimed Madame Sennier, while her husband threw out his hands in a gesture of surprise.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Know him!" exclaimed the composer. "When have I not known him? Three libretti by him have I rejected—three, madame. He challenged me to a duel, pistols, if you please! I to fire, and perhaps be shot, because he cannot write a good libretto! Which has your poor unfortunate husband accepted?"

Charmian handed the tea. She felt Madame Sennier's hard and observant eyes—they were yellow eyes, and small—fixed upon her.

"Claude's libretto has never been offered to anyone else," she answered.

Madame Sennier slightly shrugged her shoulders.

"And so Gillier is with your husband!" she observed. Apparently she was clairvoyante. "Well, madame, you are a brave woman. That is all I can say!"

"Brave! But why?"

Mrs. Shiffney's eyes looked full of laughter.

"Why, Henriette?" she asked, leaning forward. "Do tell us."

"Gillier makes other people like he is," said Madame Sennier. "But what does it matter? Each one for himself! Don't you say that in England?"

She had turned to Max Elliot.

"That applies specially to women," she continued, with her curiously ruthless and too self-possessed air. "Each woman for herself, and the Devil will carefully take the hindmost. Why should he not?"

She shot another glance at Charmian, a glance penetrating and cold as a dagger. Charmian felt that she hated this woman. And yet she admired her immensely, too. Madame Sennier would never be taken by the Devil because she was the hindmost. That was certain.

Max Elliot began to talk to Sennier and Mrs. Shiffney. Susan Fleet went over to sit with them. And Charmian had an opportunity for conversation with Madame Sennier.

She secretly shrank from her, yet she longed to be more intimate with her, to learn something from her. She felt that the Frenchwoman was completely unscrupulous. She saw cruelty in those yellow eyes. The red mouth was hard as a bar of iron in the artificial white face. Madame Sennier moved in a sea of perfume. And even this perfume troubled and disgusted, yet half fascinated Charmian, suggesting to her knowledge that she did not possess, and that perhaps helped on the way of ambition. She felt like an ignorant child, and almost preposterously English, as she talked to Madame Sennier, who became voluble in reply. There was something meridional in her manner and her fluency. Charmian felt sure that Madame Sennier had risen out of depths about which she, Charmian, knew nothing. She wondered if this woman loved her husband, or only loved the genius in him which helped her to rise, which brought her wealth, influence, even, it seemed, a curious adoration. She wondered, too, if this woman had known the first Madame Sennier.

Presently Mrs. Shiffney got up. She was apt to be restless.

"May we go and look about outside?" she said.

"Of course. Shall I—"

"No, no. I see you are interested in each other. Two wives of geniuses! I don't want to spoil it. Come, Jacques, let us explore."

They went away to the court of the gold-fish. Max Elliot followed them. As they went Madame Sennier fixed her eyes for a moment on her departing husband. In that moment Charmian found out something. Madame Sennier certainly cared for the man, as well as for the composer. Charmian fancied that love, that softness for the one, bred hatred, hardness, for many others, that it was an exclusive and almost terrible love. Now that she was alone with Madame Sennier, enclosed as it were in that strong perfume, she felt almost afraid of her. She was conscious of being with someone far cleverer than herself. And she realized what an effective weapon in certain hands is an absolute lack of scruple. It seemed to her as she sat and talked, about Paris, America, London, art, music, that this woman must have divined her

secret and intense ambition. Those yellow eyes had surely looked into her soul, and knew that she had brought Claude to Algeria in order that some day he might come forth as the rival of Jacques Sennier. Almost she felt guilty. She made a strong effort, and turned the conversation to the subject of the *Paradis Terrestre*, expressing her enthusiasm for it.

Madame Sennier received the praises with an air of gracious indifference, as if her husband's opera were now so famous that it was scarcely worth while to talk about it. This carelessness accentuated brutally the difference between her position and Charmian's. And it stung Charmian into indiscretion. Something fiery and impetuous seemed to rise up in her, something that wanted to fight. She began to speak of her husband's talent.

Madame Sennier listened politely, as one who listens on a height to small voices stealing vaguely up from below. Charmian began to underline things. It was as if one of the voices from below became strident in the determination to be adequately heard, to make its due effect. Finally she was betrayed into saying:

"Of course we wives of composers are apt to be prejudiced."

Madame Sennier stared.

"But," added Charmian, "people who really know think a great deal of my husband; Mr. Crayford, for instance."

Directly she had said this she repented of it. She realized that Claude would have hated the remark had he heard it.

Madame Sennier seemed unimpressed, and at that moment the others came in from the garden. But Charmian, why she did not know, felt increasing regret for her inadvertence. She even wished that Madame Sennier had shown some emotion, surprise, even contemptuous incredulity. The complete blankness of the Frenchwoman at that moment made Charmian uneasy.

When they were all going Mrs. Shiffney insisted on Charmian and Susan Fleet dining at the Hôtel St. George that evening. Charmian wanted to refuse and wished to go. Of course she accepted. She and Susan had no engagement to plead.

Jacques Sennier clasped her hands on parting and gazed fervently into her eyes.

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"Let me come sometimes and sit in your garden, may I, Madame?" he said, as if begging for some great boon. "Only" —he lowered his voice—"only till your husband comes back. There is inspiration here!"

Charmian knew he was talking nonsense. Nevertheless she glanced round half in dread of Madame Sennier. The yellow eyes were smiling. The white face looked humorously sarcastic.

"Of course! Whenever you like!" she said lightly.

The monkey-like hands pressed hers more closely.

"The freedom of Africa, you give it me!"

He whisked round, with a sharp and absurd movement, and joined the others.

"She is delicious!" he observed, as they walked away. "But she is very undeveloped. She has certainly never suffered. And no woman can be of much use to an artist unless she has suffered."

"Henriette, have you suffered?" said Mrs. Shiffney, laughing.

"Terribly!" said Jacques Sennier, answering for his wife. "But unfortunately not through me. That is the great flaw in our connection."

He frowned.

"I must make her suffer!" he muttered.

"My cabbage, you are a little fool and you know it!" observed Madame Sennier imperturbably. "*Mon Dieu!* What dust!"

They had emerged into the road, and were enveloped in a cloud sent up by a passing motor.

"If it doesn't rain, or they don't water the roads, I shall run away to Constantine," observed Mrs. Shiffney. "There'll be no dust in Constantine at this time of year."

CHAPTER XXI

IN the evening of the following day Charmian and Susan Fleet had just sat down to dinner, and Pierre was about to lift the lid off the soup tureen, when there was a ring at the front door bell.

"What can that be?" said Charmian.

She looked at Susan.

"Susan, I feel as if it were somebody, or something important."

Pierre raised the lid with a pathetic gesture, and went out carrying it high in his left hand.

"I wonder what it is?" said Charmian.

All day they had not seen Mrs. Shiffney or her party. They had passed the hours alone in the garden, talking, working, reading, but chiefly discussing Charmian's affairs. And calm had flowed upon Charmian, had enfolded her almost against her will. At the end of the day she had said:

"Susan, you do me more good than anyone I know. I don't understand how it is, but you seem to purify me almost, as a breeze from the sea—when it's calm—purifies a room if you open the window to it."

But now, as she waited for Pierre's return, she felt strung up and excited.

"If it should be Claude come back!" she said.

"Would he ring?" asked Susan.

"No. But he might!"

At this moment a loud murmur of talk was audible in the hall, and then a voice exclaiming:

"Ca ne fait rien! Ca ne fait rien! Laissez moi passer, mon bon!"

"Surely it's Monsieur Sennier!" exclaimed Charmian.

As she spoke, the door opened and the composer entered, pushing past Pierre, whose thin face wore an outraged look.

"Me voici!" he exclaimed. "Deserted, abandoned, I

come to you. How can I eat alone in a hotel? It is impossible! I tried. I sat down. They brought me caviare, *potage*. I looked, raised my fork, my spoon. Impossible! Will you save me from myself? See, I am in my smoking! I shall not disgrace you."

"Of course! Pierre, please lay another place. But who has abandoned you?"

"Everyone—Henriette, Adelaide, even the faithful Max. They would have taken me, but I refused to go."

"Where to?"

"Batna, Biskra, *que sais-je?* Adelaide is restless as an enraged cat!"

He sat down, and began greedily to eat his soup.

"Ah, this is good! Your cook is to be loved. For once—may I?"

Glancing up whimsically, almost like a child, he lifted his napkin toward his collar.

"I may! Madame, you are an angel. You are a flock of angels. Why, I said to them, should I leave this beautiful city to throw myself into the arms of a mad librettist, who desires my blood simply because he cannot write? Must genius die because an idiot has practised on bottles with a revolver? It shall not be!"

"Do you mean Monsieur Gillier? Then they are going to Constantine!" said Charmian sharply.

"To Constantine, Tunis, Batna, Biskra, the Sahara—*que sais-je?* Adelaide is like a cat enraged! She cannot rest! And she has seduced my Henriette."

He seemed perfectly contented, ate an excellent dinner, stayed till very late in the night, talked, joked, and finally, sitting down at the piano, played and sang. He was by turns a farceur, a wit, a man of emotion, a man with a touch of genius. And in everything he said and did he was almost preposterously unreserved. He seemed to be child, monkey and artist in combination. It was inconceivable that he could ever feel embarrassed or self-conscious.

At first, after his unexpected entry, Charmian had been almost painfully preoccupied. Sennier, without apparently noticing this, broke her preoccupation down. He was an

egoist, but a singularly amusing and even attractive one, throwing open every door, and begging you to admire and delight in every room. Charmian began to study him, this man of a great success. How different he was from Claude. Now that she was with Sennier she was more sharply aware of Claude's reserve than she had ever been before, of a certain rigidity which underlay all the apparent social readiness.

When Sennier sang, in a voice that scarcely existed but that charmed, she was really entranced. When he played after midnight she was excited, intensely excited.

It was past one o'clock when he left reluctantly, promising to return on the morrow, to take all his meals at Djenan-el-Maqui, to live there, except for the very few hours claimed by sleep, till the "cat enraged" and his wife returned. Charmian helped him to put on his coat. He resigned himself to her hands like a child. Standing quite still, he permitted her to button the coat. He left, singing an air from an opera he was composing, arm in arm with Pierre, who was to escort him to his hotel.

"I dare not go alone!" he exclaimed. "I am afraid of the Arabs! The Arabs are traitors. Gladly would they kill a genius of France!"

When he was gone, when his extraordinary personality was withdrawn, Charmian's painful preoccupation returned. She had sent Claude away because she did not wish Adelaide Shiffney to meet him. It had been an instinctive action, not preceded by any train of reasoning. Adelaide was coming out of curiosity. Therefore her curiosity should not be gratified. And now she had gone to Constantine, and taken Madame Sennier with her. Charmian remembered her inadvertence of the day before when she had said, perhaps scarcely with truth, that Jacob Crayford admired Claude's talent; the Frenchwoman's almost strangely blank expression and apparent utter indifference, her own uneasiness. That uneasiness returned now, and was accentuated. But what could happen? What could either Madame Sennier or Adelaide Shiffney do to disturb her peace or interfere with her life or Claude's? Nothing surely. Yet she felt as if they were both hostile to her, were set against all she wished for. And she felt as if she had

been like an angry child when she had talked of her husband to Madame Sennier. Women—clever, influential women—can do much either for or against a man who enters on a public career.

Charmian longed to say all that was in her heart to Susan Fleet. But, blaming herself for lack of self-control on the previous day, she resolved to exercise self-control now. So she only kissed Susan and wished her "Good-night."

"I know I shan't sleep," she said.

"Why not?"

"Sennier's playing has stirred me up too much."

"Resolve quietly to sleep, and I think you will."

Charmian did not tell Susan that she was quite incapable at that moment of resolving quietly on anything.

She lay awake nearly all night.

Meanwhile Mrs. Shiffney, Madame Sennier, and Max Elliot were in the night-train travelling to Constantine.

It had all been arranged with Mrs. Shiffney's usual apparently careless abruptness. In the afternoon, after a little talk with Henriette in the garden of the St. George, she had called the composer and Max Elliot on to the big terrace, and had said:

"I feel dull. Nothing special to do here, is there? Let's all run away to Biskra. We can take Timgad and all the rest on the way."

Max Elliot had looked at her for a moment rather sharply. Then his mind had been diverted by the lamentations of the composer, calling attention to the danger he ran in venturing near to Armand Gillier.

Elliot had a very kind heart, and by its light he sometimes read clearly a human prose that did not please him. Now, as he lay in his narrow berth in the *wagon-lit* jolting toward Constantine, he read some of Adelaide Shiffney's prose. Faintly, for the train was noisy, he heard voices in the next compartment, where Mrs. Shiffney and Madame Sennier were talking in their berths. Mrs. Shiffney was in the top berth. That fact gave the measure of Madame Sennier's iron will.

"You really believe it?" cried Madame Sennier.

"How is one to know? But Crayford is moving Heaven

and earth to find a genius. He may have his eye on Claude Heath. He believes in *les jeunes*."

"Jacques is forty."

"If one has arrived it doesn't matter much what age one is."

"You don't think Crayford can have given this man a secret commission to compose an opera?"

"Oh, no. Why should he? Besides, if he had, she would have let it out. She could never have kept such a thing to herself."

"Max thought his music wonderful, didn't he?"

"Yes, but it was all sacred. Te Deums, and things of that sort that nobody on earth would ever listen to."

"I should like to see the libretto."

"What? I can't hear. I'm right up against the roof, and the noise is dreadful."

"I say, I should like to see the libretto!" almost screamed Madame Sennier.

"Probably it's one that Jacques refused."

"No, it can't be."

"What?"

"No, it can't be. He never saw a libretto that was Algerian. And this one evidently is. I wonder if it's a good one."

"Make him show it to you."

"Gillier! He wouldn't. He hates us both."

"Not Gillier, Claude Heath."

"What?"

Mrs. Shiffney leaned desperately out over the side of her narrow berth.

"Claude Heath—or I'll make him."

"I never cared very much for the one Jacques is setting for the Metropolitan. But it was the best sent in. I chose it. I read nearly a hundred. It would be just like Gillier to write something really fine, and then not to let us see it. I always knew he was clever and might succeed some day."

"I'll get hold of it for you."

"What?"

"I'll get hold of it for you from Heath. When will Jacques be ready, do you think?"

"Oh, not for ages. He works slowly, and I never inter-

fere with him. Nobody but a fool would interfere with the method of a man of genius."

"Do you think Charmian Heath is a fool?"

At this moment the train suddenly slackened, and Mrs. Shiffney and Madame Sennier, leaning down and up, exchanged sibilant and almost simultaneous hushes.

Max Elliot heard them quite distinctly. They were the only part of the conversation which reached him.

He was an old friend of Adelaide, and was devoted to the Senniers and to their cause. But he did not quite like this expedition. He realized that these charming women, whom he was escorting to a barbaric city, were driven by curiosity, and that in their curiosity there was something secretly hostile. He wished they had stayed at Mustapha, and had decided to leave Claude Heath alone with his violent librettist. Elliot greatly disliked the active hostility to artists often shown by the partisans of other artists. There was no question, of course, of any rivalry between Heath, an almost unknown man, and Sennier, a man now of world-wide fame. Yet these two women were certainly on the qui vive. It was very absurd, he thought. But it was also rather disagreeable to him. He began to wish that Henriette were not so almost viciously determined to keep the path clear for her husband. The wife of a little man might well be afraid of every possible rival. But Sennier was not a little man.

Elliot did not understand either the nature of Henriette's heart or the nature of her mind. Nor did he know her origin. In fact, he knew very little about her.

She was just fifty, and had been for a time a governess in a merchant's family in Marseilles. This occupation she had quitted with an abruptness that had not been intentional. In fact, she had been turned out. Afterward she had remained in Marseilles, but not as a governess. Finally she had married Jacques Sennier. She was low-born, but had been very well educated, and was naturally clever. Her cleverness had throughout her life instinctively sought an outlet in intrigue. Some women intrigue when circumstances drive them to subterfuge, trickery and underhand dealing. Henriette Sennier needed no incentive of that kind. She liked intrigue for its

own sake. In Marseilles she had lived in the midst of a network of double dealing connected with so-called love. When she married Jacques Sennier she had exchanged it for intrigue connected with art. She was by nature suspicious and inquisitive, generally unable to trust because she was untrustworthy. But her devotion to her Jacques was sincere and concentrated. It helped to make her cruel, but it helped to make her strong. She was incapable of betraying Jacques, but she was capable of betraying everyone for Jacques.

Without the slightest uneasiness she had left him alone at Mustapha. He was the only person she trusted—for a week. She meant to be back at Mustapha within a week.

After their "Hush!" she and Mrs. Shiffney decided not to talk any more.

"It makes my throat ache shouting up against the roof," said Mrs. Shiffney.

She had, how or why she scarcely knew, come to occupy an upper berth for the first time in her life. She resented this. And she resented it still more when Madame Sennier replied:

"I wanted you to choose the lower bed, but I thought you preferred being where you are."

Mrs. Shiffney made no reply, but turned carefully over till she was looking at the wall.

"Why do I do things for this woman?" was her thought. She had told herself more than once that she was travelling to Constantine for Henriette. Apparently she was actually beginning to believe her own statement. She closed her eyes, opened them again, looked at the ceiling, which almost touched her nose, and at the wall, which her nose almost touched.

"Why does a woman ever do anything for another woman?" she asked herself, amplifying her first thought.

Adelaide Shiffney in an upper berth! It was the incredible accomplished!

CHAPTER XXII

"WHAT a setting for melodrama!" said Mrs. Shiffney. She was standing on the balcony of a corner room on the second floor of the Grand Hotel at Constantine, looking down on the Place de la Brèche. Evening was beginning to fall. The city roared a tumultuous serenade to its delicate beauty. The voices sent up from the dusty gardens, the squares, and the winding alleys, from the teeming bazaars, the dancing-houses, the houses of pleasure, and the painted Moorish cafés, seemed to grow more defiant as the light grew colder on the great slopes of the mountains that surround Constantine, as in the folds of the shallow valleys the plantations of eucalyptus darkened beside the streams.

Madame Sennier was standing with Mrs. Shiffney and was also looking down.

"Listen to all the voices!" she said. "Nobody but Jacques could ever get this sort of effect into an opera."

A huge diligence, painted yellow, green, and red, with an immense hood beneath which crowded Arabs vaguely showed, came slowly down the hill, drawn by seven gray horses. The military Governor passed by on horseback, preceded by a mounted soldier, and followed by two more soldiers and by a Spahi, whose red jacket gleamed against the white coat of his prancing stallion. Bugles sounded; bells rang; a donkey brayed with dreary violence in a side street. Somewhere a mandoline was being thrummed, and a very French voice rose above it singing a song of the Paris pavements. In the large cafés just below the balcony where the two women were standing crowds of people were seated at little tables, sipping absinthe, vermouth, and bright-colored syrups. Among the Europeans of various nations the dignified and ample figures of well-dressed Arabs in pale blue, green, brown, and white burnouses, with high turbans bound by ropes of camel's hair, stood out, the conquered looking like conquerors.

"*Cirez! Cirez!*" cried incessantly the Arab boot-polishers,

who scuffled and played tricks among themselves while they waited for customers. "*Cirez, moosoul Cirez!*" Long wagons, loaded with stone from the quarries of the Gorge, jangled by, some of them drawn by mixed teams of eleven horses and mules, on whose necks chimed collars of bells. Chauffeurs sounded the horns of their motors as they slowly crept through the nonchalant crowd of natives, which had gathered in front of the post-office and the Municipal Theater to discuss the affairs of the day. Maltese coachmen, seated on the boxes of large landaus, cracked their whips to announce to the Kabyle Chasseurs of the two hotels the return of travellers from their excursions. Omnibuses rolled slowly up from the station loaded with luggage, which was vehemently grasped by native porters, brought to earth, and carried in with eager violence. The animation of the city was intense, and had in it something barbaric and almost savage, something that seemed undisciplined, bred of the orange and red soil, of the orange and red rocks, of the snow and sun-smitten mountains, of the terrific gorges and precipices which made the landscape vital and almost terrible.

Yet in the evening light the distant slopes, the sharply cut silhouettes of the hills, held a strange and exquisitely delicate serenity. The sky, cloudless, shot with primrose, blue, and green, deepening toward the West into a red that was flecked with gold, was calm and almost tender. Nature showed two sides of her soul; but humanity seemed to respond only to the side that was fierce and violent.

"What a setting for melodrama!" repeated Mrs. Shiffney.

She sighed. At that moment the presence of Henriette irritated her. She wanted to be alone, leaning to watch this ever-shifting torrent of humanity. This balcony belonged to her room. She had revenged herself for the upper berth by securing a room much better placed than Henriette's. But if Henriette intended to live in it—

Suddenly she drew back rather sharply. She had just seen, in the midst of the crowd, the tall figure of Claude Heath moving toward the café immediately opposite to her balcony.

"Is my tea never coming?" she said. "I think I shall get into a tea-gown and lie down a little before dinner."

Madame Sennier followed her into the room.

"Till dinner, then," she said. "We are sure to see them, I suppose?"

"Of course. Leave the libretto entirely to me. He would be certain to suspect any move on your part."

Madame Sennier's white face looked very hard as she nodded and left the room. She met the waiter bringing Mrs. Shiffney's tea at the door.

When she and the waiter were both gone Mrs. Shiffney drank her tea on the balcony, sitting largely on a cane chair. She felt agreeably excited. Claude Heath had gone into the café on the other side of the road, and was now sitting alone at a little table on the terrace which projects into the Place beneath the Hôtel de Paris. Mrs. Shiffney saw a waiter take his order and bring him coffee, while a little Arab, kneeling, set to work on his boots.

All day long Claude and Gillier had remained invisible. Mrs. Shiffney, Henriette, and Max Elliot, after visiting the native quarters in the morning, had expected to see the two men at lunch, but they had not appeared. Now the two women had just returned from a drive round the city and to the suspension bridge which spans the terror of the Gorge. And here was Claude Heath just opposite to Mrs. Shiffney, no doubt serenely unconscious of her presence in Constantine! As Mrs. Shiffney sipped her tea and looked down at him she thought again, "What a setting for melodrama!"

She was a very civilized child of her age, and believed that she had a horror of melodrama, looking upon it as a degraded form of art, or artlessness, which pleased people whom she occasionally saw but would never know. But this evening some part of her almost desired it, not as a spectacle, but as something in which she could take an active part. In this town she felt adventurous. It was difficult to look at this crowd without thinking of violent lives and deeds of violence. It was difficult to look at Claude Heath without the desire to pay him back here with interest for a certain indifference.

"But I'm not really melodramatic," said Adelaide Shiffney to herself.

She could resent, but she was not a very good hater. She felt generally too *affairée*, too civilized to hate. In her heart she rather disliked Claude Heath as once she had rather liked him. He had had the impertinence and lack of taste to decline her friendship, tacitly, of course, but quite definitely. She had never been in love with him. If she had been she would have been more definite with him. But he had attracted her a good deal; and she always resented even the crossing of a whim. Something in his personality and something in his physique had appealed to her, a strangeness and height, an imaginativeness and remoteness which features and gesture often showed in despite of his intention. He was not like everybody. It would have been interesting to take him in hand. It had certainly been irritating to make no impression upon him. And now he was married and living in a delicious Arab nest with that foolish Charmian Mansfield. So Mrs. Shiffney called Charmian at that moment. Suddenly she felt rather melancholy and rather cross. She wanted to give somebody a slap. She put down her teacup, lit a cigarette, and drew her chair to the rail of the balcony.

Claude Heath was sipping his coffee. One long-fingered musical hand lay on his knee. His soft hat was tilted a little forward over the eyes that were watching the crowd. Probably he was thinking about his opera.

Mrs. Shiffney was incapable of Henriette's hard and bitter determination. Her love was not fastened irrevocably on any man. She wished that it was, or thought she did. Such a passion must give a new interest to life. Often she fancied she was in love; but the feeling passed, and she bemoaned its passing. Henriette was determined to keep a clear field for her composer. She was ready to be suspicious, to be jealous of every musical shadow. Mrs. Shiffney found herself wishing that she had Henriette's incentive as she looked at Claude Heath. She could not see his face quite clearly. Perhaps when she did—

That he should have married that silly Charmian Mansfield! Ever since then Mrs. Shiffney had resolved to wipe them both off her slate—gradually. Charmian had been right in her supposition. But now Mrs. Shiffney thought she was perhaps

on the edge of something that might be more amusing than a mere wiping off the slate.

Of course Claude Heath and Gillier would be at dinner. It would be rather fun to see Claude's face when she walked in with Henriette and Max Elliot.

She got up and stood by the rail; and now she looked down on Claude with intention, willing that he should look up at her. Why should not she have the fun of seeing his surprise while she was alone? Why should she share with Henriette?

Without turning his eyes in her direction Claude rapped on his table with a piece of money, paid a waiter for his coffee, got up, made his way out of the café, and mingled with the crowd. He did not come toward the hotel, but turned up the street leading to the Governor's palace and disappeared. Mrs. Shiffney noticed an Arab in a blue jacket and a white burnous, who joined him as he left the café.

"Local color, I suppose," she murmured to herself. She wished she could go off like that in the strange and violent crowd, could be quite independent.

"What a curse it is to be a woman!" she thought.

Then she resolved after dinner to go out for a stroll with Claude. Henriette should not come. If she, Adelaide Shiffney, were going to work for Henriette she must be left to work in her own way. She thought of the little intrigue that was on foot, and smiled. Then she looked out beyond the Place, over the dusty public gardens and the houses, to the far-off, serene, bare mountains. For a moment their calm outlines held her eyes. For a moment the clamor of voices from below seemed to die out of her ears. Then she shivered, drew back into her room, and felt for the knob of the electric light. Darkness was falling, and it was growing cold on this rocky height which frowned above the gorge of the Rummel.

Neither Claude Heath nor Gillier appeared at dinner. Their absence was discussed by Mrs. Shiffney and her friends, and Mrs. Shiffney told them that she had seen Claude Heath that evening in a café. After dinner Henriette Sennier remarked discontentedly:

"What are we going to do?"

"Max, why don't you get a guide and take Henriette out

to see some dancing? There is dancing only five minutes from here," said Mrs. Shiffney.

"Well, but you—aren't you coming?"

She had exchanged a glance with Henriette.

"I must write some letters. If I'm not too long over them perhaps I'll follow you. I can't miss you. All the dancing is in the same street."

"But I don't think there are any dancing women here."

"The Kabyle boys dance. Go to see them, and I'll probably follow you."

As soon as they were gone Mrs. Shiffney put on a fur coat, summoned an Arab called Amor, who had already spoken to her at the door of the hotel, and said to him:

"You know the tall Englishman who is staying here?"

"The one who takes Aloui as guide?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. But he is fond of music; he—"

"It is Aloui's Englishman," interrupted Amor, calmly.

"Where does he go at night? He's a friend of mine. I should like to meet him."

"He might be with Said Hitani."

"Where is that?"

"If madame does not mind a little walk—"

"Take me there. Is it far?"

"It is on the edge of the town, close to the wall. When Said Hitani plays he likes to go there. He is growing old. He does not want to play where everybody can hear. Madame has a family in England?"

Mrs. Shiffney satisfied Amor's curiosity as they walked through the crowded streets till they came to the outskirts of the city. The stars were out, but there was no moon. The road ran by the city wall. Far down below, in the arms of the darkness, lay the gorge, from which rose faintly the sound of water; lay the immense stretches of yellow-brown and red-brown country darkened here and there with splashes of green; the dim plantations, the cascades which fall to the valley of Sidi Imcin; the long roads, like flung-out ribands, winding into the great distances which suggest eternal things. From the darkness, as from the mouth of a mighty cavern, rose a wind, not strong, very pure, very keen, which seemed dashed

with the spray of water. Now and then an Arab passed muffled in burnous and hood, a fold of linen held to his mouth. The noise of the city was hushed.

Presently Amor stood still.

"*Voilà* Said Hitani!"

Mrs. Shiffney heard in the distance a sound of music. Several instruments combined to make it, but the voice of a flute was dominant among them. Light, sweet, delicate, it came to her in the night like a personality full of odd magic, full of small and subtle surprises, intricate, gay, and sad.

"Said Hitani!" she said. "He's delicious! Take me to him, Amor."

She knew at once that he was the flute-player.

They walked on, and soon came to a patch of light on the empty road. This was shed by the lamps of the café from which the music issued. Under the two windows, which were protected by wire and by iron bars, five Arabs were squatting, immersed in a sea of garments in which their figures and even their features were lost. Only their black eyes looked out, gazing steadily into the darkness. A big man, with bare legs and a spotted turban, came to the door of the café to invite them to go in; but Mrs. Shiffney refused by a gesture.

"In a minute!" she said to Amor.

Amor spoke in Arabic to the attendant, who at once returned to the coffee niche. Within the music never ceased, and now singing voices alternated with the instruments. Mrs. Shiffney kept away from the door and looked into the room through the window space next to it.

She saw a long and rather narrow chamber, with a paved floor, strewn with clean straw mats, blue-green walls, and an orange-colored ceiling. Close to the door was the coffee niche. At the opposite end of the room five musicians were squatting, four in a semicircle facing the coffee niche, the fifth alone, almost facing them. This fifth was Saïd Hitani, the famous flute-player of Constantine—a man at this time sixty-three years old. In front of him was a flat board, on which lay two freshly rolled cigarettes and several cigarette ends. Now and then he took his flute from his lips, replaced

it with a lighted cigarette, smoked for a moment, then swiftly renewed his strange love-song, playing with a virile vigor as well as with airy daintiness and elaborate grace. Of his companions, one played a violin, held upright by the left hand, with its end resting on his stockinged foot; the second a species of large guitar; the third a derbouka; and the fourth a tarah, or native tambourine, ornamented with ten little discs of brass, which made a soft clashing sound when shaken. On the left of the room, down one side, squatted a row of Arabs with coffee-cups and cigarettes. By the door two more were playing a game of draughts. And opposite to the windows, on an Oriental rug, the long figure of Claude Heath was stretched out. He lay with his hat tilted to the left over one temple, his cheek on his left hand, listening intently to the music. On a wooden board beside him was some music paper, and now and then with a stylograph he jotted down some notes. He looked both emotional and thoughtful. Often his imaginative eyes rested on the small and hunched-up figure of Said Hitani, dressed in white, black, and gold, with a hood drawn over the head. Now and then he looked toward the window, and it seemed to Mrs. Shiffney then that his eyes met hers. But he saw nothing, except perhaps some Eastern vision summoned up by his lit imagination.

The music very gradually quickened and grew louder, became steadily more masculine, powerful, and fierce, till it sounded violent. The volume of tone produced by the players astonished Mrs. Shiffney. The wild vagaries of the flute seemed presently to be taking place in her brain. She drew close to the window, put her hands on the bars. At her feet the crouching Arabs never stirred. Behind her the cold wind came up from the gorge and the great open country with the sound of the rushing water.

At that moment she had the thing that she believed she lived for—a really keen sensation.

Suddenly, when the music had become almost intolerably exciting, when the players seemed possessed, and noise and swiftness to rush together like foes to the attack, the flute wavered, ran up to a height, cried out like a thing martyred; the violin gave forth a thin scream; on the derbouka the brown

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fingers of the player pattered with abrupt feebleness; the guitar died away; the little brass discs shivered and fell together. Another thin cry from the flute upon some unknown height, and there was silence, while Claude wrote furiously, and the musicians began to smoke.

"Now I'll go in!" said Mrs. Shiffney to Amor.

He led the way and she followed. Claude glanced up, stared for a moment, then sprang up.

"Mrs. Shiffney!"

His voice was almost stern.

"Mrs. Shiffney!" he repeated.

"Come to hear your music, for I know they are all playing only for you and the opera."

Her strong, almost masculine hand lingered in his, and how could he let it go without impoliteness?

"Aren't they?"

"I suppose so."

"It's wonderful the way they play. Said Hitani is an artist."

"You know his name?"

"And I must know him. May I stay a little?"

"Of course."

He looked round for a seat.

"No, the rug!" she said.

And, despite her bulk, she sank down with a swift ease that was almost Oriental.

"Now please introduce me to Said Hitani!"

Till late in the night she stayed between the blue-green walls, listening to the vehement voices and to the instruments, following all the strange journeys of Said Hitani's flute. She was genuinely fascinated, and this fact made her fascinating. As she had caught at Max Elliot that day when he asked her, against his intention, to meet Claude Heath, so now she caught at Claude Heath himself. She had come to the café with a purpose, and, as she forgot it, she carried it out. Never before had Claude understood completely why she had gained her position in London and Paris, realized fully her fascination. Her delightful naturalness, her pleasure, her almost boyish gaiety, her simplicity, her humor took him captive for the

moment. She explained that she had left her companions and stolen away to enjoy Constantine alone.

"And now I'm interrupting you. But you must forgive me just for this one night!"

Through Amor, who acted as interpreter, she carried on a lively intercourse with Said Hitani. The other musicians smiled, but seldom spoke, and only among themselves. But Said Hitani, the great artist of his native city, a man famous far and wide among the Arabs, was infinitely diverting and descriptive in talk even as when he gave himself to the flute. With an animation that was youthful he described the meaning of each new song. He had two flutes on which he played alternately—"Mousou et Madame," he called them. And he knew, so he declared, over a hundred songs. Mrs. Shiffney, speaking to him always through Amor, told him of London, and what a sensation he and his companions would make there in the *décor* of a Moorish café. Said Hitani pulled his little gray beard with his delicate hands, swayed to and fro, and smiled. Then sharply he uttered a torrent of words which seemed almost to fight their way out of some chamber in his narrow throat.

"Said Hitani says you have only to send money and the address and they are all coming whenever you like. They are very pleased to come."

At this point one of the musicians, a fair man with pale eyes who played the tarah, interposed a remark which was uttered with great seriousness.

"Can they go to London on camels, he wishes to know," observed Amor gently.

Said Hitani waited for Mrs. Shiffney's answer with a slightly judicial air, moving his head as if in approval of the tarah-player's forethought.

"I'm afraid they can't."

The tarah-player spoke again.

"He says, can they go on donkeys?"

"No. It is further than Paris, tell him."

"Then they must go on the sea. Paris is across the sea."

"Yes, they will have to take a steamer."

At this juncture it was found that the tarah-player would not be of the party.

"He says he would be very sick, and no man can play when he is sick."

"What will Madame pay?" interposed Said Hitani.

Mrs. Shiffney declared seriously that she would think it over, make a calculation, and Amor should convey her decision as to price to him on the morrow.

All seemed well satisfied with this. And the tarah-player remarked, after a slight pause, that he would wait to know about the price before he decided whether he would be too sick to play in London. Then, at a signal from Said Hitani, they all took up their instruments and played and sang a garden song called *Mabouf*, describing how a Sheik and his best loved wife walked in a great garden and sang one against the other.

"It has been quite delicious!" said Mrs. Shiffney to Claude, when at last the song *Au Revoir*, tumultuously brilliant with a tremendous crescendo at the close, had been played, and with many salaams and good wishes the musicians had departed.

"I love their playing," Claude answered. "But really you shouldn't have paid them. I have arranged with Hitani to come every evening."

"Oh, but I paid them for wanting to know whether they could go to London on camels. What a success your opera ought to be if you have got a fine libretto."

They were just leaving the café.

"Do let us stand by the wall for a minute," she added. "By that tree. It is so wonderful here."

Claude's guide, Aloui, had come to accompany him home, and was behind with Amor. They stayed in the doorway of the café. Mrs. Shiffney and Claude leaned on the wall, looking down into the vast void from which rose the cool wind and the sound of water.

"What would I give to be a creative artist!" she said. "That must add so much meaning to all this. Do you know how fortunate you are? Do you know you possess the earth?"

The sable sleeve of her coat touched Claude's arm and hand. Her deep voice sounded warm and full of genuine feeling. A short time ago, when she had come into the café, he had been both astonished and vexed to see her. Now he knew that he

had enjoyed this evening more than any other evening that he had spent in Constantine.

"But there are plenty of drawbacks," he said.

"Oh, no, not real ones! After this evening—well, I shall wish for your success. Till now I didn't care in the least. Indeed, I believe I hoped you never would have a great success."

She moved slightly nearer to him.

"Did you?" he said.

"Yes. You've always been so horrid to me, when I always wanted to be nice to you."

"Oh, but—"

"Don't let us talk about it. What does it matter now? I thought I might have done something for you once, have helped you on a little, perhaps. But now you are married and settled and will make your own way. I feel it. You don't want anyone's help. You've come away from us all, and how right you've been. And Charmian's done the right thing, too, giving up all our nonsense for your work. Sacrifice means success. You are bound to have it. I feel you are going to. Ah, you don't know how I sometimes long to be linked, really linked, to the striving, the abnegation, the patience, the triumph of a man of genius! People envy my silly little position, as they call it. And what is it worth? And yet I do know, I have an instinct, a flair, for the real thing. I'm ignorant. I can dare to acknowledge it to you. But I can tell what is good and bad, and sometimes even why a thing is good. I'm led away, of course. In a silly social life like mine everybody is led away. We can't help it. But I could have been worth something in the art life of a big man, if I'd loved him."

How soft sable is against a hand!

"I'm sure you could," Claude said.

"And as it is—"

She stopped speaking abruptly. Then with a marked change of voice she said:

"Oh, do forgive me for committing the unpardonable sin—babbling about myself! You're the only person I have ever—Forget all about it, won't you? I don't know why I did it. It was the music, I suppose, and the strangeness of this place.

and thinking of your work and your hopes for the future. It made me wish I had some too, either for myself or for—for someone like you."

As if irresistibly governed by feeling her voice had again changed, become once more warm as with emotion. But now she drew herself up a little and laughed.

"Don't be afraid! It's over! But you have had a glimpse no one else has ever had, and I know you'll keep it to yourself. Let's talk of something else—anything. Tell me something about your libretto, if you care to."

As they walked slowly toward the heart of the city, followed by the two Arabs, she took Claude's arm, very naturally, as if half for protection, half because it was dark and false steps were possible.

And he told her a good deal, finally a great deal, about the libretto.

"It sounds wonderful!" she said. "I'm so glad! But may I give you a little bit of advice?"

"Yes, do."

"Don't say anything about it to Henriette—Madame Sennier."

"No. But—"

"Why not? I scarcely know. My instinct! Don't!"

"I won't," Claude said.

"I'd give anything to read it. But if I were you I wouldn't let anyone read it. As you probably know, I'm in half the secrets of the artistic world, and always have been. But there isn't one woman in a hundred who can be trusted to hold her tongue. Is this the hotel? Good-night. Yes, isn't it a delicious coat? *Bonne nuit*, Amor! *À demain!*"

A minute later Mrs. Shiffney tapped at Henriette's door, which was immediately opened.

"It is all right," she whispered. "I shall have the libretto to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO days later Mrs. Shiffney slipped Gillier's libretto surreptitiously into Claude's hand.

"It's splendid!" she almost whispered. "With such a libretto you can't fail."

They were in the deserted salon of the hotel, among armchairs, albums, and old French picture-papers. Mrs. Shiffney looked toward the door.

"Don't let anyone know I've read it—especially Henriette. She's a dear and a great friend of mine, but, all the same, she'd be horribly jealous. There's only one thing about the libretto that frightens me."

"What is it? Do tell me!"

"Having so many Easterns in it. If by any chance you should ever want to produce your opera—" She hesitated, with her eyes fixed upon him. "In America, I fancy—no, I think I'm being absurd."

"But what do you mean? Do tell me! Not that there's the slightest chance yet of my opera ever being done anywhere."

"Well, it's only that Americans do so hate what they call color."

"Oh, but that is only in negroes!"

"Is it? Then I'm talking nonsense! I'm so glad! Not a word to Henriette! Hush! Here she is!"

At that moment the door opened and the white face of Madame Sennier looked in.

"What are you two doing here? Where is Max?"

"Gone to arrange about the sleeping-car."

Claude slipped the libretto into the pocket of his jacket. In London he had been rather inclined to like Madame Sennier. In Constantine he felt ill at ease with her. He detected the secret hostility which she scarcely troubled to conceal, though she covered it with an air of careless indifference. Now and then a corner of the covering slipped down, leaving a surface

exposed, which, to Claude, seemed ugly. To-day at this moment she seemed unable to mask entirely some angry feeling which possessed her. How different she was from Mrs. Shiffney! Claude had enjoyed Mrs. Shiffney's visit. She had rescued him from his solitude with Gillier—a solitude which he had endured for the sake of the opera, but which had been odious to him. She had warmed him by her apparent enthusiasm, by her sympathy. He had been obliged to acknowledge that she was very forgiving. He had certainly not been "nice" to her in London. Her simplicity in telling him she had felt his conduct, her sweetness in being so ready to forget it, to enter into his expectations, to wish him well, had fascinated him, roused his chivalry. But most of all had her few words by the wall after Said Hitani's music touched him, been instrumental in bringing him nearer to her.

"She showed me a bit of her real self," he thought. "And she was not sorry afterward that she had shown it to me."

He had made her a return for this, the return which she had wanted; but to Claude it seemed no return at all.

"You are really going away to-night?" he said now. And there was a note of regret in his voice which was not missed by her.

"I can't possibly leave Jacques alone any longer," said Madame Sennier. "And what have we to do here? We aren't getting local color for an opera."

"No, no; of course, you want to get away!" said Claude quickly, and stiffening with constraint.

"I should love to stay on. This place fascinates me by its strangeness, its marvellous position," said Mrs. Shiffney.

She looked at Claude.

"But I suppose we must go back. Will you take me for a last walk before tea?"

"Of course."

Madame Sennier passed the tip of her tongue across her scarlet lips.

"Over the bridge and up into the pine-wood?"

"Wherever you like."

At this moment Armand Gillier walked brusquely into the room. Mrs. Shiffney turned to Henriette.

"We'll leave Monsieur Gillier to take care of you."

Henriette's lips tightened. Gillier said:

"*Bien*, madame!"

As Mrs. Shiffney and Claude left the room Gillier bowed with very formal politeness. The door shut. After a pause Gillier said:

"You go away to-night, madame?"

Madame Sennier sat down on a settee by a round table on which lay several copies of *L'Illustration*, in glazed black covers, *La Dêpêche Algérienne*, and a guide to Constantine.

She had been awake most of the previous night, with jealous care studying the libretto Gillier had sold to Claude, which had been put into her hands by Mrs. Shiffney. At once she had recognized its unusual merit. She had in a high degree the faculty, possessed by many clever Frenchwomen, of detecting and appraising the value of a work of art. She was furious because Gillier's libretto had never been submitted to her husband; but she could not say all that was in her mind. She and Adelaide Shiffney had been frank with each other in the matter, and she had no intention of making any mistake because she was angry.

"We haven't much time to spare. Jacques has to get on with his new opera."

Gillier sat down on a chair with a certain cold and reluctant but definite politeness. His look and manner said: "I cannot, of course, leave this lady whom I hate."

"He is a great man now. I congratulate you on his success."

"Jacques was always a great man, but he didn't quite understand it."

"You enlightened him, madame."

"Exactly."

"That was very clever of you."

"It wasn't stupid. But I don't happen to be a stupid woman." Her yellow eyes narrowed.

"I know how to detect quality. And I suppose you do?"

"Why, madame?"

"You tried to sell libretti to my husband before he was famous."

"And failed."

"Yes. But now I'm glad to know you have succeeded with another man who is not famous yet."

Gillier laid his right hand down on one of the glazed black covers of *L'Illustration.*

"You do not believe in my talent, madame. I cannot understand why you should be interested in such a matter."

"You make the mistake of supposing that a talented man can never be immature. What you offered to my husband was immature; but I always knew you had talent."

"Indeed? You never told me so that I remember."

"You appeared to be fully aware of it."

Gillier made a fist of his hand on the cover. He wished Jacques Sennier were setting the libretto he had sold to Claude Heath, and Madame Sennier wished exactly the same thing. He did not know her thought; but she divined his. With all her soul, greedy for her Jacques and for herself, she coveted that libretto. She almost hated Claude Heath for possessing it. And now, as she sat opposite to Gillier, with the round table between them, always alert for intrigue, she began to wonder whether in truth the libretto was irrevocably lost to them.

"Weren't you?" she said, fixing her unflinching eyes upon him.

"I knew I was not quite such a fool as your husband certainly thought me."

"Jacques is a mere baby outside of his art."

"*Si?*"

"That is why I have to think for him very often. Which of the libretti has Mr. Heath bought?"

"It is not one of those I had the honor of showing to Monsieur Sennier."

"Really? You have written another specially for Mr. Heath?"

"I wrote another to please myself. His wife saw it and took it to him. He was so foolish as to think it good enough to buy."

"Let us hope his music will be good enough to produce on the stage."

Gillier looked very sharply at her, and began to tug at his moustache; but he said nothing. After a moment Madame Sennier said, with a change of tone and manner that seemed to indicate an intention to be more friendly:

"When you write another libretto, why not let me see it?"

"You desire to inflict a fourth rejection upon me, madame?"

"If you like, I'll tell you the only thing I desire," she replied, with a sort of brutal frankness well calculated to appeal to his rough character. "It has nothing to do with you. I haven't your interests at my heart. Why should I bother about them? All I want is to get something fine for my husband when a chance arises. I know what's good better than you do, my friend. You showed me three libretti that didn't do. Show me one that does do, and I'll pay you a price that will astonish you."

Gillier's large eyes shone.

"How much would you pay?"

"Show me a fine libretto!"

"Tell me how much you'd pay."

She laughed.

"Five times as much as anyone else offered you. But you would have to prove the offer to my satisfaction."

Gillier fidgeted on his chair, took hold of the *Dépêche Algérienne*, and began carefully to fold it into pleats.

"I should want a royalty," he said, keeping his shining eyes on her.

"If I were satisfied I would see that you got it."

There was a long silence, during which they looked at each other.

Gillier was puzzled. He did not believe Claude Heath had shown the libretto to her. Yet she was surely prompted now by some very definite purpose. He could not guess what it was. At last he looked down at the paper he was folding mechanically.

"I haven't got anything to sell at present," he almost growled, in a very low voice.

"That's a pity. We must hope for the future. There is no reason why you and I should be mortal enemies since you haven't had a chance to murder my poor old cabbage."

"He's a coward," said Gillier.

"Of course he is. And I'm very thankful for it. Cowards live long."

She got up from the settee. Gillier, returning to his varnish, sprang up, dropping the paper, and opened the door.

"Don't forget what I said," she remarked as she went out. "Five times the price anyone else offers, on account of a royalty to be fixed by mutual agreement. But it would have to be a libretto *numéro un*."

He looked at her but did not say a word.

When she was gone he sat down again by the round table and stared at the cloth, with his head bent and his muscular, large-boned arms laid one upon the other.

And presently he swore under his breath.

Meanwhile Mrs. Shiffney and Claude were making their way through the crowded and noisy street toward the unfinished Suspension Bridge which spans the gorge, linking the city to the height which is crowned by the great hospital. Beyond the hospital, opposite to the Grand Rocher, a terrific precipice of rock beneath which a cascade leaps down to the valley where lie the baths of Sidi Imcin, is a wood of fir-trees commanding an immense view. This was the objective of their walk. The sun shone warmly, brightly, over the roaring city, perched on its savage height and crowding down to its precipices, as if seeking for destruction. Clarions sounded from the woods, where hidden soldiers were carrying out evolutions. Now and then a dull roar in the distance, like the noise of a far-off earthquake, proclaimed the activities of men among the rocks. From the bazaars in the maze of covered alleys that stretch down the hill below the Place du Chameau, from the narrow and slippery pavements that wind between the mauve and the pale yellow house fronts, came incessant cries and the long and dull murmur of voices. Bellebelles were singing everywhere in their tiny cages, heedless of their captivity. On tiny wooden tables and stands before the insouciant workers at trades, and the indifferent sellers of goods, were set vases of pale yellow jonquils. Round the minarets fluttered the pigeons. And again, floating across the terrific gorge, came the brave notes of the military clarions.

"There is something here which I have never felt in any other place," said Mrs. Shiffney to Claude. "A peculiar wildness. It makes one want to cry out. The rocks seem to have life almost under one's feet. And the water in that terrible gorge, that's like a devil's moat round the city, is more alive than water in other places. It's so strange to have known you in Mullion House and to find you here. How eternally interesting life is!"

She did not always think so, but at this moment she really found life interesting.

"I shall never forget this little time!" she added. "I haven't enjoyed myself so much for years. And now it's nearly over. What a bore!"

Claude felt exhilarated too. The day was so bright, so alive, seemed full of wildness and gaiety and lusty freedom.

"Let us enjoy what is left!" he said.

She stole a side glance at him as he swung along by her. How would it be to be married to a man like him—a man with his way to make?

They came down to the bridge, escaping from the bustle of the city. From the fir woods the clarions sounded louder, calling to each other like bold and triumphant voices.

"Have you got those in your opera?" she asked him.

"I shall have them."

"Of course."

They talked a little about the libretto as they crossed the bridge, with the sound of the water in their ears.

"It is good to be out of the city!" Claude said, as they came to the rubble of the unfinished track on the farther side, where Arabs worked under the supervision of a French overseer. "I did not know you were a walker."

"I don't think you knew very much about me."

"That's quite true. Where do you wish to go?"

"Anywhere—to the left. Let us sit on a rock under the trees and look at the view."

"Can you get up here?"

"If you give me your hand."

They walked a little way in the shadow of the fir-trees,

leaving the hospital on their right. The plantation was almost deserted. The soldiers were evidently retiring, for the clarions sounded more distant now. Here and there the figure of an Arab was visible sauntering slowly among the trees, with the smoke of his cigarette dispersing above him. Some young Jews went by, holding hands, laughing and talking. They sent glances of hard inquiry at Mrs. Shiffney's broad figure from their too intelligent eyes. Soon their thin forms vanished among the gray trunks.

"Shall we sit there?" asked Claude.

"Yes; just in the sun."

"Oh, but you wanted—"

"No, let us sit in the sun."

She opened her green parasol.

Almost at the edge of the cliff, which descended steeply to the high road to Philippeville, was a flat ledge of rock warmed by the sunbeams.

"It's perfect here," she said, sitting down. "And what a view!"

They were exactly opposite to the terrific Grand Rocher, a gray and pale yellow precipice, with the cascades and the Grand Moulin at its foot, the last houses of the city perched upon its summit in the sky.

"And to think that women have been flung from there!" said Claude, clasping his hands round his knees.

"Unfaithful women! Rather hard on them!" she answered. "If London husbands—" She stopped. "No don't let us think of London. And yet I suppose you loved it in that little house of yours?"

"I think I did."

"Don't you ever regret that little house?"

She saw his eyebrows move downward.

"Oh, I—I'm very fond of Djenan-el-Maqui."

"And no wonder! Only you seemed so much a part of your London home. You seemed to belong to it. There was an odd little sense of mystery."

"Was there?"

"And I felt it was necessary to you, to your talent. How could I feel that without ever hearing your music? I did."

"Don't I seem to belong to Djenan-el-Maqui?"

"I've never seen you there," she answered, with a deliberate evasiveness.

Claude looked at her for a moment, then looked away over the immense view. It seemed to him that this woman was beginning to understand him too well, perhaps.

"Of course," she added. "There is a sense of mystery in an Arab house. But it's such a different kind. And I think we each have our own particular brand of mystery. Now yours was a very special brand, quite unlike anyone else's."

"I certainly got to love my little house."

"Because it was doing things for you."

Claude looked at her again, and thought how intelligent her eyes were. As he looked at them they seemed to grow more intelligent—as if in answer to his gaze.

"Right things," she added, with an emphasis on the penultimate word.

"But—forgive me—how can you know?"

"I do know. I'm an ignoramus with marvellous instincts in certain directions. That's why a lot of people—silly people, you think, I daresay—follow my lead."

"Well, but—"

"Go on!"

"I think I'd better not."

"You can say anything to me. I'm never in a hurry to take offense."

"I was going to say that you seemed rather to wish once to draw me out of my shell into a very different kind of life," said Claude slowly, hesitatingly, and slightly reddening.

"I acted quite against my artistic instinct when I did that."

"Why?"

Mrs. Shiffney looked at him in silence for a moment. She was wishing to blush. But that was an effort beyond her powers.

Very far away behind them a clarion sounded.

"The soldiers must be going back to barracks, I suppose," she said.

Claude was feeling treacherous, absurdly. The thought of

Charmian had come to him, and with it the disagreeable, almost hateful sensation.

"Yes, I suppose they are," he said coldly.

He did not mean to speak coldly; but directly he had said the words he knew that his voice had become frigid.

"What a stupid ass I am!" was his comment on himself. But how to be different?

Mrs. Shiffney was looking very grave. Her drawn-down brows, her powerful lips suggested to him at this moment suffering. In London he had thought of her as a typical pleasure-seeking woman, greedy of sensation, reckless in the chase after it. And he had disliked, almost feared her, despite her careless charm. Now he felt differently about her. He had come to that point in a man's acquaintance with a woman when he says to himself, "I never understood her properly." He seemed to himself a brute. Yet what had he done?

She did not speak for several minutes. He wanted to speak, to break a silence which, to him, was painful; but he could think of nothing to say. He felt oddly moved, yet he could not have said why, perhaps even to himself. Keeping his hands clasped round his knees, he looked out beyond the gorge over the open country. Far down, at the foot of the cascades, he saw in a hollow the clustering trees about the baths of Sidi Imcin. Along the reddish bareness of the hill showed the white blossoms of some fruit-trees, almost like a white dust flung up against the tawny breast of the earth. The water made a hoarse noise in the hidden depths of the gorge, lifted its voice into a roar as it leaped down into the valley, murmured like the voice of a happy dreamer where it slipped by among the trees. And Claude, as he sat in silence, believed that he heard clearly the threefold utterance, subtly combined, and, like some strange trinity, striving to tell him truths of life.

His eyes travelled beyond the gorge, the precipices, the tree-tops, beyond the hard white track far down beneath his feet, to the open country, bare, splendid, almost incredibly spacious, fiercely blooming in the strong colors—reds, yellows, golds—with long rolling slopes, dimpling shallow depressions, snakelike roads, visible surely for hundreds of kilometers, far-

off ranges of solemn mountains whose crests seemed to hint at divinity. And as he looked he felt that he wanted, or perhaps needed, something that he had certainly never had, that must exist, that must have been, be, known to some few men and women; only that something experienced made life truly life.

For a moment, in some mysterious process of the mind, Claude mingled his companion with the dream and the longing, transfigured, standing for women rather than a woman.

During that moment Mrs. Shiffney watched him, and London desires connected with him returned to her, were very strong within her. She had come to him as a spy from an enemy's camp. She had fulfilled her mission. Any further action must be taken by Henriette—was, perhaps, at this very moment being taken by her. But if this man had been different she might well have been on his side. Even now—

Claude felt her eyes upon him and looked at her. And now she deliberately allowed him to see her thought, her desire. What did it matter if he was married? What on earth had such a commonplace matter as marriage got to do with it?

Her look, not to be misunderstood, brought Claude at once back to that firm ground on which he walked with Charmian and his own instinctive loyalty; an austere rubbish in Mrs. Shiffney's consideration of it.

He unclasped his hands from his knees. At that moment he saw the minotaur thing, with its teeth and claws, heard the shuddering voice of it. He wanted to look away at once from Mrs. Shiffney, but he could not. All that he could do was to try not to show by his eyes that he understood her desire and was recoiling from it.

Of course, he failed, as any other man must have failed. She followed every step of his retreat, and sarcasm flickered into her face, transforming it.

"Don't you think I understand you?" she said lightly. "Don't you think you ought to have lived on in Mullion House?"

As she spoke she got up and gently brushed some twigs from her tailor-made skirt.

Claude sprang up, hoping to be helped by movement.

"Oh, no, I had had quite enough of it!" he replied, forcing himself to seem careless, yet conscious that little of what he was feeling was unknown by her at this moment.

"And your opera could never have been brought to the birth there."

She had turned, and they walked slowly back among the fir-trees toward the bridge.

"You knew that, perhaps, and were wise in your generation."

Claude said nothing, and she continued:

"I always think one of the signs of greatness in an artist is his knowledge of what environment, what way of life, is necessary to his talent. No one can know that for him. Every really great artist is as inflexible as the Grand Rocher."

She pointed with her right hand toward the precipice.

"That is why women always love and hate him."

Her eyes and her voice lightly mocked him. She turned her head and looked at him, smiling:

"I am sure Charmian knows that."

Claude reddened to the roots of his hair and felt suddenly abased.

"There are very few great artists in the world," he said.

"And, so, very few inflexible men?"

"I have never—"

He pulled himself up.

"Yes?" she said encouragingly.

"I was only going to say," he said, speaking now doggedly, "that I have never laid claim to anything—anything in the way of talent. It isn't quite fair, is it, to assume that I consider myself a man of talent or an important person when I don't?"

"Do you really mean to tell me that you don't think yourself a man of talent?"

"I am entirely unknown."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Nothing, of course, but—but perhaps it is only when he has something to offer, and has offered it, that a man knows what is his value."

"In that case you will know when you have produced your opera."

Claude looked down.

"All my good wishes and my prayers will go with you from now till its production," she continued, always lightly. "I have a right to be specially interested since that evening with Said Hitani. And then I have been privileged. I have read the libretto."

As she spoke Claude was conscious of uneasiness. He thought of Charmian, of Mrs. Shiffney, of the libretto. Had he not been carried away by events, by atmosphere, perhaps, and by the influence of music, which always had upon him such a dangerously powerful effect? He remembered the night when he had written his decisive letter to Charmian. Music had guided him then. Had it not guided him again in Constantine? Was it angel or demon in his life?

"Help me down, please. It's a little difficult here."

He took Mrs. Shiffney's hand. Its clasp now told him nothing.

They crossed the bridge and came once more into the violent activities, into the perpetual uproar of the city.

By the evening train Mrs. Shiffney and her party left for Algiers. Claude went down to the station to see them off.

On the platform they found Armand Gillier, with a bunch of flowers in his hand.

Just as the train was about to start he presented it to Madame Sennier.

From the window of the *wagon-lit* Mrs. Shiffney looked at the two men standing together as the train drew away from the platform.

Then she nodded and waved her hand.

There was a mocking smile on her face.

When the station was hidden she leaned back, turning toward Henriette.

"Claude Heath is a fool!" she said. "I wonder when he will begin to suspect it?"

"Men have to take their time over things like that," remarked Henriette. "What hideous flowers these are! I think I shall throw them out of the window."

"No, don't!"

"Why not?"

"They are a symbol of your reconciliation with Armand Gillier."

"He isn't altogether a fool, I fancy," remarked Henriette, laying Gillier's bouquet down on the seat beside her. "But we shall see."

"Oh, Max! Yes, come in and sit with us!"

The faces of the two women changed as Max Elliot joined them.

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER their return from Constantine Mrs. Shiffney and her party only stayed two nights at Mustapha. Then they descended to the harbor and went on board *The Wanderer*, which weighed anchor and set sail for Monte Carlo. Before leaving they paid a visit to Djenan-el-Maqui to say adieu to Charmian.

The day was unusually hot for the time of year, and both Mrs. Shiffney and Madame Sennier were shrouded in white veils with patterns. These, the latest things from Paris, were almost like masks. Little of the faces beneath them could be seen. But no doubt they preserved complexions from the destructive influence of the sun.

Jacques Sennier had told his friends and his wife the story of his days of desertion. A name summed it up, Djenan-el-Maqui. With the utmost vivacity, however, he had described all he had eaten, drunk, smoked, and done in that hospitable house and garden; the impression he had made upon the occupants and had received from them.

"I am beloved by all!" he had cried, with enthusiasm. "They would die for me. As for the good Pierre, each night he led me home as if I were his own child!"

"We must certainly go and thank them," said Mrs. Shiffney, laughing.

The visit was not without intensities.

"We've come to say 'Good-bye,'" said Mrs. Shiffney, when they came into the "harem," as she persisted in calling the drawing-room. "We are just back from our little run, and now we must be off to Monte Carlo. By the way, we came across your husband in Constantine."

"I know. He wrote to me all about it," said Charmian.

Claude had really written a very short note, ending with the maddening phrase, "all news when we meet." She was

burning with curiosity, was tingling almost with suspicion. As she looked at those veils, and saw the shining of the feminine eyes behind them, it seemed to her that the two women lay in ambush while she stood defenseless in the open.

"Jacques has been telling me about your kindness to him," said Madame Sennier, "and your long talks about opera, America, the audiences over there, the managers, the money-making. I'm afraid he must have bored you with our affairs."

"Oh, no!" said Charmian quickly, and faintly reddening. "We have had a delightful time."

"Adorable!" said Sennier. "And those syrups of fruit, the strawberry, the greengage! And the omelettes of Jeanne, 'Jeanne la Grande,' "—he flung forth his arms to indicate the breadth of the cook. "And the evenings of moonlight, when we wandered between the passion-flowers!"

He blew a kiss.

"Shall I forget them? Never!"

Madame Sennier was evidently quite undisturbed.

"You've given him a good time," she observed. "Indeed I'm afraid you've spoilt him. But are there really passion-flowers in the garden?"

"I don't believe it!" said Max Elliot, laughing.

The composer seized his arm.

"Come with me, Max, and I will show you. England, that is the land of the sceptics. But you shall learn to have faith. And you, my Susan, come!"

He seized these two, who happened to be nearest to him, and, laughing like a child, but with imperative hands, compelled them to go out with him to the courtyard. Their steps died away on the pavement. The three women were left alone.

"Shall we sit in the court?" said Charmian. "I think it's cooler there. There's a little breeze from the sea."

"Let us go, then," said Madame Sennier.

When they were sitting not far from the fountain, which made a pleasant murmur as it fell into the pool where the three goldfish moved slowly as if in a vague and perpetual search, Charmian turned the conversation to Constantine.

"It's perfectly marvellous!" said Mrs. Shiffney. "Barbaric and extraordinary."

And she talked of the gorge and of the Chemin des Touristes. Madame Sennier spoke of the terrific wall of rock from which, in the days before the French occupation, faithless wives were sometimes hurled to death by their Arab husbands.

"*C'est affreux!*" she exclaimed, lapsing into French. She put up her hand to her veil, and pulled it tightly under her prominent chin with twisting fingers.

"*Les Arabes sont des monstres.*"

As she spoke, as with her cold yellow eyes she glanced through the interstices of her veil at Charmian, she thought of Claude's libretto.

"Oh, but they are very attractive!" said Charmian quickly.

She, too, was thinking of the libretto with its Arab characters, its African setting. Not knowing, not suspecting that Madame Sennier had read it, she supposed that Madame Sennier was expressing a real and instinctive disgust.

The Frenchwoman shrugged her shoulders.

"*Ce sont tous des monstres malpropres!*"

"Henriette can't bear them," said Mrs. Shiffney, pushing a dried leaf of eucalyptus idly over the pavement with the point of her black-and-white parasol. "And do you know I really believe that there is a strong antipathy between West and East. I don't think Europeans and Americans really feel attracted by Arabs, except perhaps just at first because they are picturesque."

"Americans!" cried Madame Sennier. "Why, anything to do with what they call color drives them quite mad!"

"Negroes are not Arabs," said Charmian, almost warmly.

"It is all the same. *Ils sont tous des monstres affreux.*"

"Tst! Tst! Tst!"

The voice of Jacques came up from the garden.

"What is it?"

"Tst! Tst!"

They were silent, and heard in the distance faintly a sound of drumming and of native music.

"I must go! I must hear, see!"

The composer cried out.

"Come with me, my Susan, and you, Max, old person!"

There was a patter of running feet, a sound of full-throated laughter from Elliot, and presently silence but for the now very distant music.

"He is a baby," observed Madame Sennier.

She yawned, slightly blowing out her veil.

"How hot it is!"

Pierre came out carrying a tray on which were some of the famous fruit syrups, iced lemonade, cakes, and bonbons.

"These are the things your husband loves," said Charmian, pointing to the syrups. "I wonder—" She paused. "Did you make as great friends with my husband as I have made with yours?" she asked lightly.

Madame Sennier spread out her hands, which were encased in thick white kid gloves sewn with black. Her amazingly thin figure, which made ignorant people wonder whether she possessed the physical mechanism declared by anatomists to be necessary to human life, somehow proclaimed a negative.

"My husband opens his door, the window too. Yours keeps his door shut and the blinds over the window. Jacques gives all, like a child. Your husband seems to give sometimes; but he really gives nothing."

"Of course, the English temperament is very different from the French," said Charmian, in a constrained voice.

"Very!" said Mrs. Shiffney.

Was she smiling behind the veil?

"You ought to go to America," said Madame Sennier. "Nobody knows what real life is who has not seen New York in the season. Paris, London, they are sleepy villages in comparison with New York."

"I should like to see it," replied Charmian. "But we have nothing to take us there, no reason to go."

She laughed and added:

"And Claude and I are not millionaires."

Madame Sennier talked for two or three minutes of the great expense of living in a smart New York hotel, and then said:

"But some day you will surely go."

"There doesn't seem any prospect of it," said Charmian.

"D'you remember meeting a funny little man called Crayford in my house one night, an impresario?" said Mrs. Shiffney, moving her shoulders, and pulling at one of her long gloves, as if she were bored and must find some occupation.

"Yes, I believe I do—a man with a tiny beard."

"Like a little inquiring goat's! D'you know that he's searching the world to find some composer to run against Jacques? Isn't it so, Henriette?"

"So they say in New York," said Madame Sennier. "I wish he could find one; then perhaps he would leave off bothering us with absurd proposals. And I'm sure there is plenty of room for some more shining lights. I told Crayford if he worried Jacques any more I would unearth someone for him. He doesn't know where to look."

"But surely—" began Charmian.

"Why do you think that?" asked Mrs. Shiffney, in an uninterested voice.

Her brilliant eyes looked extraordinary, like some strange exotic bird's eyes, through her veil.

"Because he began his search with England," said Madame Sennier.

"Well, really—Henriette!" observed Mrs. Shiffney, with a faint laugh.

"Ought I to apologize?" said Madame Sennier, turning to Charmian. "When art is in question I believe in speaking the plain truth. Oh, I know your husband is by way of writing an opera! But, of course, one sees that—well, you are here in this delicious little house, having what the Americans call a lovely time, enjoying North Africa, listening to the fountain, walking, as my old baby says, among passion-flowers, and playing about with that joke from the Quartier Latin, Armand Gillier. *Mais, ma chère, ce n'est pas sérieux!* One has only to look at your interesting husband, to see him in the African *milieu*, to see that. And, of course, one realizes at once that you see through it all! A pretty game! If one is well off one can afford it. Jacques and I starved; but it was quite right that we should. The English talent is not for opera. The Te Deum, the cathedral service, the oratorio in one form or another, in fact the thing with a sacred basis,

that is where the English strength lies. It is in the blood. But opera!" Her shoulders went up. "Ah, here they come! Jacques, my cabbage, you are to be petted for the last time! Here are your syrups."

Jacques Sennier came, almost running.

"Did they ever nearly starve?" Charmian asked Mrs. Shiffney, when for a moment the attention of all the others was distracted from her by some wild joke of the composer's.

"Henriette thinks so, I believe. Perhaps that is why Jacques is eating all your biscuits now."

When the moment of parting came Jaques Sennier was almost in tears. He insisted on going into the kitchen to say farewell to "la grande Jeanne." He took Pierre in his arms, solemnly blessed Caroline, and warmly pressed his lips to Charmian's hands as he held them, squeezed one on the top of the other, in both his own.

"I shall dedicate my new opera to you and to your syrups!" he exclaimed. "To the greengage, ah, and the passion-flowers! Max, you old person, have you seen them, or have you not? The wonderful Washington was not more truthful than I."

His eyes twinkled.

"Were it not that I am a physical coward, I would not go even now. But to die because a man who cannot write has practised on soda-water bottles! I fly before Armand Gillier. But, madame, I fear your respectable husband is even more cowardly than I!"

"Why?" said Charmian, at length releasing her hands from his Simian grasp.

"He accepted a libretto!"

When they were gone Charmian was suddenly overcome by a sense of profound depression such as she had never felt before. With them seemed to go a world; and it was a world that some part of her loved and longed for. Sennier stood for fame, for success; his wife for the glory of the woman who aids and is crowned; Mrs. Shiffney and Max Elliot for the joy and the power that belong to great patrons of the arts. An immense vitality went away with them all. So long as they

were with her the little Arab house, the little African garden, had stood in the center of things, in the heart of vital things. The two women had troubled Charmian. Madame Sennier had almost frightened her. Yet something in both of them fascinated, must always fascinate such a mind and temperament as hers. They meant so much to the men who were known. And they had made themselves known. Both were women who stood apart from the great crowd. When their names were mentioned everyone—who counted—knew who they were.

As to Jacques Sennier, he left a crevasse in the life at Djenan-el-Maqui. It had been a dangerous experience for Charmian, the associating in intimacy with the little famous man. Her secret ambitions were irritated almost to the point of nervous exasperation. But she only knew it now that he was gone.

Madame Sennier had frightened her.

"*Mais, ma chère, ce n'est pas sérieux!*"

The words had been said with an air of hard and careless authority, as if the speaker knew she was expressing the obvious truth, and a truth known to both her hearers; and then the words which had followed: "One has only to look at your interesting husband, to see him in the African *milieu*, to see that!"

What had happened at Constantine? How had Claude been?

Charmian wanted so much to see him, to hear his account of the whole matter, that she telegraphed:

"Come back as soon as you can they have gone very dull here.—CHARMIAN."

She knew that in sending this telegram she was coming out of her rôle; but her nerves drove her into the weakness.

Within a week Claude and Gillier returned.

Charmian noticed at once that their expedition had not drawn the two men together, that their manner to each other was cold and constrained. On the day of their return she persuaded Gillier to dine at the villa. He seemed reluctant to accept, but she overcame his hesitation.

"I want to hear all about it," she said. "You must remem-

ber what a keen interest I have in everything that has to do with the opera."

Gillier looked at her oddly, with a sort of furtive inquiry, she thought. Then he said formally:

"I am delighted to stay, madame."

During dinner he became more expansive, but Claude seemed to Charmian to become more constrained. Beneath his constraint excitement lay in hiding. He looked tired; but his imaginative eyes shone as if they could not help speaking, although his lips were often dumb. Only when he was talking to Susan Fleet did he seem to be comparatively at ease.

The good Algerian wine went round, and Gillier's tongue was gradually unloosed. Some of the crust of formality flaked off from him, and his voice became a little louder. His manner, too, was more animated. Nevertheless, Charmian noticed that from time to time he regarded her with the oddly furtive look at which she had wondered before dinner.

Presently Gillier found himself alone with Charmian. Susan Fleet and Claude were pacing up and down in the garden among the geraniums. Charmian and Gillier sat at the edge of the court. Gillier sipped his Turkish coffee, poured out a glass of old brandy, clipped a big Havana cigar, which he took from an open box on a little low table beside him. His large eyes rested on Charmian, and she thought how disagreeably expressive they were. She did not like this man, though she admired his remarkable talent. But she had had a purpose in persuading him to stay that evening, and she was resolved to carry it out.

"Has it gone off well?" she asked, with a careful lightness, a careful carelessness which she hoped was deceiving. "Were you able to put my husband in the way of seeing and hearing everything that could help him with his music?"

"Oh, yes, madame! He saw, heard everything."

Gillier blew forth a cloud of smoke, turned a little in his chair and looked at his cigar. He seemed to be considering something.

"Then the expedition was a success?" said Charmian.

Gillier glanced at her and took another sip of brandy.

"Who knows, madame?"

"Who knows? Why, how do you mean?"

"Madame, since I have been away with your husband I confess I begin to have certain doubts."

"Doubts!" said Charmian, in a changed and almost challenging voice. "I don't quite understand."

"That your husband is a clever man, I realize. He has evidently much knowledge of the technique of music, much imagination. He is an original, though he seldom shows it, and wishes to conceal it."

"Then—"

"A moment, madame! You will say, 'That is good for the opera!' "

"Naturally!"

"That depends. I do not know whether his sort of originality is what the public will appreciate. But I do know very well that your husband and I will never get on together."

"Why not?"

"He is not my sort. I don't understand him. And I confess that I feel anxious."

"Anxious? What about, monsieur?"

"Madame, I have written a great libretto. I want a great opera made of it. It is my nature to speak frankly; perhaps you may call it brutally, but I am not *homme du monde*. I am not a little man of the salons. I am not accustomed to live in kid gloves. I have sweated. I have seen life. I have been, and I still am, poor—poor, madame! But, madame, I do not intend to remain sunk to my neck in poverty for ever. No!"

"Of course not—with your talent!"

"Ah, that is just it!"

His eyes shone with excitement as he went on, leaning toward her, and speaking almost with violence.

"That is just it! My talent for the stage is great, I have always known that. Even when my work was refused once, a second, a third time, I knew it. 'The day will come,' I thought, 'when those who now refuse my work will come crawling to me to get me to write for them. Now I am told to go! Then they will seek me.' Yes"—he paused, finished his glass of brandy, and continued, more quietly, as if he

were making a great effort after self-control—"but is your husband's talent for the stage as great as mine? I doubt it."

"Why do you doubt it?" exclaimed Charmian warmly. "What reason have you to doubt it? You have not heard my husband's music to your libretto yet, not a note of it."

"No. And that enables me—"

"Enables you to do what? Why didn't you finish your sentence, Monsieur Gillier?"

"Madame, if you are going to be angry with me—"

"Angry! My dear Monsieur Gillier, I am not angry! What can you be thinking of?"

"I feared by your words, your manner—"

"I assure you—besides, what is there to be angry about? But do finish what you were saying."

"I was about to say that the fact that I have not yet heard any of your husband's music to my libretto enables me, without any offense—personal offense—pronouncing any sort of judgment—to approach you—" He paused. The expression in her eyes made him pause. He fidgeted rather uneasily in his chair, and looked away from her to the fountain.

"Yes?" said Charmian.

"Madame?"

"Please tell me what it is you want of me, or my husband, or of both of us."

"I do not—I have not said I want anything. But it is true I want success. I want it for this work of mine. Since I have been in Constantine with Monsieur Heath I have—very reluctantly, madame, believe me!—come to the conclusion that he and I are not suited to be associated together in the production of a work of art. We are too different the one from the other. I am an Algerian ex-soldier, a man who has gone into the depths of life. He is an English Puritan who never has lived, and never will live. I have done all I could to make him understand something of the life not merely in, but that underlies—*underlies*—my libretto. My efforts—well, what can I say?"—he flung out his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"It is only the difference between the French and English temperaments."

"No, madame. It is the difference between the man who is and the man who is not afraid to live."

"I don't agree with you," said Charmian coldly. "But really it is not a matter which I can discuss with you."

"I have no wish to discuss it. All I wish to say is this"—he looked down, hesitated, then with a sort of dogged obstinacy continued, "that I am willing to buy back my libretto from you at the price for which I sold it. I have come to the conclusion that it is not likely to suit your husband's talent. I am very poor indeed, alas! but I prefer to lose a hundred pounds rather than to—"

"Have you spoken to my husband of this?" Charmian interrupted him.

She was almost trembling with anger and excitement, but she managed to speak quietly.

"No, madame."

"You have asked me a question—"

"I have asked no question, madame!"

"Do you mean to say you are not asking me if we will resell the libretto?"

Gillier was silent.

"My answer is that the libretto is our property and that we intend to keep it. If you offered us five times what we gave you for it the answer would be the same."

She paused. Gillier said nothing. She looked at him and suddenly anger, a sense of outrage, got the better of her, and she added with intense bitterness:

"We are living here in North Africa, we have given up our home, our friends, our occupations, everything—our life in England"—her voice trembled. "Everything, I say, in order to do justice to your work, and you come, you dare to come to us, and ask—ask—"

Gillier got up.

"Madame, I see it is useless. You have bought my work, if you choose to keep it—"

"We do choose to keep it."

"Then I can do nothing."

He pulled out his watch.

"It is late. I must wish you good-night, madame. Kindly

say good-night for me to that lady, your friend, and to Monsieur Heath."

He bowed. Charmian did not hold out her hand. She meant to, but it seemed to her that her hand refused to move, as if it had a will of its own to resist hers.

"Good-night," she said.

She watched his rather short and broad figure pass across the open space of the court and disappear.

After he had gone she moved across the court to the fountain and sat down at its edge. She was trembling now, and her excitement was growing in solitude. But she still had the desire to govern it, the hope that she would be able to do so. She felt that she had been grossly insulted by Gillier. But she was not only angry with him. She stared at the rising and falling water, clasping her hands tightly together. "I will be calm!" she was saying to herself. "I will be calm, mistress of myself."

But suddenly she got up, went swiftly across the court to the garden entrance, and called out:

"Susan! Claude! Where are you?"

Her voice sounded to her sharp and piercing in the night.

"What is it, Charmian?" answered Claude's voice from the distance.

"I'm going to bed. It's late. Monsieur Gillier has gone."

"Coming!" answered Claude's voice.

Charmian retreated to the house.

As she came into the drawing-room she looked at her watch. It was barely ten o'clock. In a moment Susan Fleet entered, followed by Claude. Susan's calm eyes glanced at Charmian's face. Then she said, in her quiet, agreeable voice:

"I'm going to my room. I have two or three letters to write, and I shall read a little before going to bed. It isn't really very late, but I daresay you are tried."

She took Charmian's hand and held it for an instant. And during that instant Charmian felt much calmer.

"Good-night, Susan dear. Monsieur Gillier asked me to say good-night to you for him."

Susan did not kiss her, said good-night to Claude, and went quietly away.

"What is it?" Claude said, directly she had gone. "What's the matter, Charmian? Why did Gillier go away so early?"

"Let us go upstairs," she answered.

Remembering the sound of her voice in the court, she strove to keep it natural, even gentle, now. Susan's recent touch had helped her a little.

"All right," he answered.

"Come into my sitting-room for a minute," she said, when they were in the narrow gallery which ran round the drawing-room on the upper story of the house.

Next to her bedroom Charmian had a tiny room, a sort of nook, where she wrote her letters and did accounts.

"Well, what is it?" Claude asked again, when he had followed her into this room, which was lit only by a hanging antique lamp.

"How could you show the libretto to Madame Sennier?" said Charmian. "How could you be so mad as to do such a thing?"

As she finished speaking she sat down on the little divan in the embrasure of the small grated window.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "I have never shown the libretto to Madame Sennier. What could put such an idea into your head?"

"But you must have shown it!"

"Charmian, I have this moment told you that I haven't."

"She has read it."

"Nonsense."

"I am positive she has read it."

"Then Gillier must have shown her a copy of it."

Charmian was silent for a minute. Then she said:

"You did not show it to anyone while you were at Constantine?"

"I didn't say that."

"Ah! You—you let Mrs. Shiffney see it!"

Her voice rose as she said the last words.

"I suppose I have a right to allow anyone I choose to read a libretto I have bought and paid for," he said coldly, almost sternly.

"You did give it to Mrs. Shiffney then! You did! You did!"

"Certainly I did!"

"And then—then you come to me and say that Madame Sennier hasn't read it!"

There was a sound of acute, almost of fierce exasperation in her voice.

"She had not read my copy."

"I say she has!"

"Mrs. Shiffney herself specially advised me not to show it to her."

"To her—to Madame Sennier?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Shiffney advised you! Oh—you—oh, that men should claim to have keener intellects than we women! Ah! Ah!"

She began to laugh hysterically, then suddenly put a handkerchief before her mouth, turned her head away from him and pressed her face, with the handkerchief still held to it, against the cushions of the divan. Her body shook.

"Charmian!" he said. "Charmian!"

She looked up. All one side of her face was red. She dropped her handkerchief on the floor.

"Do you understand now?" she said. "But, of course, you don't. Well, then!"

She put both her hands palm downward on the divan, and, speaking slowly with an emphasis that was cutting, and stretching her body till her shoulders were slightly raised, she said:

"Just now, while Susan and you were in the garden, Armand Gillier asked me if we would give up his libretto."

"Give up the libretto?"

"Sell it back to him for one hundred pounds. He also said he was very poor. Do you put the two things together?"

"You think he fancies—"

"No. I am sure he knows he could resell it at an advance to Jacques Sennier. Those two—Mrs. Shiffney and Madame Sennier—went to Constantine with the intention of finding out what you were doing."

"Absurd!"

"Is it? Just tell me! Wasn't it Mrs. Shiffney who began to talk of the libretto?"

"Well—"

"Of course it was! And didn't she pretend to be deeply interested in what you were doing?"

Claude flushed.

"And didn't she talk of how other artists had trusted her with secrets nobody else knew? And didn't she—didn't she—"

But something in Claude's eyes stopped her as she was going to say—"make love to you."

"And so you gave your libretto up to our enemy to read, and now they are trying to bribe Gillier to ruin us. Why are we here? Why did I give up everything, my whole life, my mother, my friends, our little house, everything I cared for, everything that has made my life till now? Simply for you and for your success. And then for the first woman who comes along—"

Her cheeks were flaming. As she thought more about what had happened a storm of jealousy swept through her heart.

"That's not true or fair—what you imply!" said Claude. "I never—Mrs. Shiffney is absolutely nothing to me—nothing!"

"Do you understand now that she got the libretto in order to show it to Madame Sennier?"

"Did Gillier ever say so?"

"Of course not! Even if he knows it, do you think it was necessary he should—to a woman!"

The contempt in her voice seemed to cut into him. He began, against his will, to feel that Charmian must be right in her supposition, to believe that he had been tricked.

"We have no proof," he said.

Charmian raised her eyebrows and sank back on the divan. She was struggling against an outburst of tears. Her lips moved.

"Proof! Proof!" she said at last.

Her lips moved violently. She got up, and tried hurriedly

to go by Claude into the gallery; but he put out a hand and caught her by the arm.

"Charmian!"

She tried to get away. But he held her.

"I do understand. You have given up a lot for me. Perhaps I was a great fool at Constantine. I begin to believe I was. But, after all, there's no great harm done. The libretto is mine—ours, ours. And we're not going to give it up. I'll try—I'll try to put my heart into the music, to bring off a real success, to give you all you want, pay you back for all you've given up for me and the work. Of course, I may fail—"

She stopped his mouth with her lips, wrenched herself from his grasp, and hurried away.

A moment later he heard the heavy low door of her bedroom creak as she pushed it to, then the grinding of the key in the lock.

He sat down on the divan she had just left. For a moment he sat still, facing the gallery, and the carved wooden balustrade which protected its further side. Then he turned and looked out through the low, grated window, from which no doubt in days long since gone by veiled Arab women had looked as they sat idly on the divan.

He saw a section of almost black-purple sky. He saw some stars. And, leaning his cheek on his hand, he gazed through the little window for a long, long time.

CHAPTER XXV

MORE than a year had passed away. April held sway over Algeria.

In the white Arab house on the hill Claude and Charmian still lived and Claude still worked. To escape the great heat of the previous summer they had gone to England for a time, but early October had found them once more at Djenan-el-Maqui, and since then they had not stirred.

Their visit to London had been a strange experience for Charmian.

They had arrived in town at the beginning of July, and had stayed with Mrs. Mansfield in Berkeley Square. Mrs. Mansfield had not paid her proposed visit to Algiers. She had written that she was growing old and lazy, and dreaded a sea voyage. But she had received them with a warmth of affection which had earned their immediate forgiveness. There was still a month of "season" to run, and Charmian went about and saw her old friends. But Claude refused to go out, and returned at once to orchestral studies with his "coach." He even remained in London during the whole of August and September, while Charmian paid some visits, and went to the sea with her mother. Thus they had been separated for a time after their long sojourn together in the closest intimacy.

Charmian found that she missed Claude very much. One day she said to her mother, with pretended lightness and smiling:

"Madre, I've got such a habit of Claude and Claude's work that I seem to be in half when I'm not with him."

Mrs. Mansfield wondered whether her son-in-law felt in half when he was by himself in London.

To Charmian, coming back, London and "the set" seemed changed. She had sometimes suffered from ennui in Africa, even from loneliness in the first months there. She had got up dreading the empty days, and had often longed to have a

party in the evening to look forward to. In England she realized that not only had she got a habit of Claude, but that she had got a habit, or almost a habit, of Africa and a quiet life in the sunshine under blue skies. If the opera were finished, the need for living in Mustapha removed, would she be glad not to return to Djenan-el-Maqui? The mere thought of never seeing the little white house with its cupolas and its flat roof again sent a sharp pang through her. Pierre, with his arched eyebrows and upraised, upturned palm, "La Grande Jeanne," Bibi, little Fatma, they had become almost a dear part of her life.

But soon she fell into old ways of thought and of action, though she was never, she believed, quite the same Charmian as before. She longed, as of old, but even more strongly, to conquer the set, and this world of pleasure-seekers and connoisseurs. But she looked upon them from the outside, whereas before she had been inside. During her long absence she had certainly "dropped out" a little. She realized the root indifference of most people to those who are not perpetually before them, making a claim to friendship. When she reappeared in London many whom she had hitherto looked upon as friends greeted her with a casual, "Oh, are you back after all? We thought you had quite forsaken us!" And it was impossible for even Charmian to suppose that such a forsaking would have been felt as a great affliction.

This recognition on her part of the small place she had held, even as merely a charming girl, in this society, made Charmian think of Djenan-el-Maqui with a stronger affection, but also made her long in a new, and more ruthless way, to triumph in London, as clever wives of great celebrities triumph. She saw Madame Sennier several times, as usual surrounded and fêted. And Madame Sennier, though she nodded and said a few words, scarcely seemed to remember who Charmian was. Only once did Charmian see a peculiarly keen expression in the yellow eyes as they looked at her. That was when some mention was made of a project of Crayford's, his intention to build a big opera house in London. Madame Sennier had shrugged her shoulders. But as she answered, "What would be the use? The Metropolitan has

nearly killed him. Covent Garden, with its subscription, would simply finish him off. He has moved Heaven and earth to get Jacques' new opera either for America or England, but of course we laughed at him. He may pretend as much as he likes, but he's got nothing up his sleeve"—the yellow eyes had fixed themselves upon Charmian with an intent look that was almost like a look of inquiry.

To Sennier she had only spoken twice. The first time he had forgotten who she was. The second time he had exclaimed, "Ah, the syrups! the greengage! and the moonlight among the passion-flowers!" and had greeted her with effusion.

But he had never come to call on her.

She still felt a sort of fondness for him; but she understood that he was like a child who needed perpetual petting and did not care very much from whom it came.

The impression she received, on coming back to this world after a long absence, was of a shifting quicksand. She also now knew absolutely how much of a nobody she was in it.

She had returned to Africa caring for it much less, but longing much more to conquer it and to dominate it.

On that day in October, a gorgeous day which had surely lain long in the heart of summer, when she saw again the climbing white town on the hill, when later she stood again in the Arab court, hearing the French voices of the servants, the guttural chatter of Bibi and Fatma, seeing the three gold fish making their eternal pilgrimage through the water shed by the fountain into the marble basin, she felt an intimate thrill at her heart. There was something here that she loved as she loved nothing in London.

From the night when Claude and Armand Gillier had returned to Mustapha after the visit to Constantine "the opera" had been to Charmian almost as a living thing—a thing for which she had fought, from which she had beaten off enemies. She thought of it as their child, Claude's and hers. They had no other child. She did not regret that.

Claude had long ago learnt to work in his home without difficulty. The paralysis which had beset him in Kensington had not returned. He was inclined to believe that by con-

stant effort he had strengthened his will. But he had also become thoroughly accustomed to married life. And the fact that Charmian had become accustomed to it, too, had helped him without his being conscious of it. The embarrassment of beginnings was gone. And something else was gone; the sense of secret combat which in the first months of their marriage had made life so difficult to both of them.

The man had given in to the woman. When Claude left England with Gillier's bought libretto he was a conquered man. And this fact had brought about a cessation of struggle and had created a sensation of calm even in the conquered.

Every day now, when Claude went up to his room on the roof to work at the opera, he was doing exactly what his wife wished him to do. By degrees he had come to believe that he was also doing what he wished to do.

He was no longer reserved about his work with Charmian. The barriers were broken down. The wife knew what the husband was doing. They "talked things over."

Twice during their long sojourn at Mustapha they had been visited by Alston Lake. And now, in the first days of April, came a note from Saint Eugene. Gillier was once more in Algeria. He had never given them a sign of life since he had tried to buy back his libretto from them. Now he wrote formally, saying he was paying a short visit to his family, and asking permission to call at Djenan-el-Maqui at any hour that would suit them. His note was addressed to Claude, who at once showed it to Charmian.

"Of course we must let him come," Claude said.

"Of course!"

She turned the note over, twisted it in her fingers.

"How I hate him!" she said. "I can't help it. His insult to you and—"

"Don't let us go into all that again. It is so long ago."

"This letter brings it all back."

She made a grimace of disgust.

"Why should you see him?" said Claude. "Let me see him alone. You can easily have an engagement. You are going to those theatricals at the Hotel Continental on Friday. Let me have him here then."

"Shall I?" She glanced at Claude. "No, I'd better be here too."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know—but I'd better! Tell him to come on Thursday."

"Lunch?"

"Oh, no! Let us just have him in the afternoon."

Gillier came at the time appointed, and was received by Charmian, who made a creditable effort to behave as if she were at her ease and glad to see him. She made him sit down with her in the cosiest corner of the drawing-room, gave him coffee and a cigarette, and promised that Claude would come in a moment.

In the morning of that day she had persuaded Claude to let her have a quarter of an hour alone with Gillier. He had asked her why she wanted to be alone with a man she disliked. She had replied, "After Constantine, don't you think you had bêtter leave the practical part of it to me?" Claude had reddened slightly, but he had only said, "Very well. But I don't quite see what you mean. We have no reason to suppose Gillier has a special purpose in coming." "No, But I should like that quarter of an hour."

So now she and Gillier sat together in the shady drawing-room, and she asked him about Paris and his family, and he replied with a stiff formality which had in it something military.

Directly Charmian had looked at Gillier she had realized that he had a definite purpose in coming. She was on the defensive, but she tried not to show it. Presently she said:

"Have you been working—writing?"

"Yes, madame."

"Another libretto?"

"Madame," Gillier said, with a sort of icy fierceness, "I cannot believe that you are good enough to be genuinely interested in my unsuccessful life."

After the unpleasant scene at Djenan-el-Maqui Gillier had returned to Paris, shut himself in, and labored almost with fury on a libretto destined for Jacques Sennier. He had taken immense pains and trouble, and had not spared time.

At last the work had been completed, typed, and submitted to Madame Sennier. After a week of anxious waiting Gillier had received the libretto with the following note:

"DEAR GILLIER,—This might do very well for some unknown genius, say Monsieur Heath, but it is no good to a man like Jacques. Nevertheless, we believe in you still, and renew our offer. Send us a fine libretto, *such as I know you can write*, and we will pay you five times as much as anyone else would, on account of a royalty. We should not mind even if *someone else* had already tried to set it. All we care about is to get your *best work*. HENRIETTE SENNIER."

Gillier had torn this note up with fury. Then he had thought things over and paid Madame Sennier a visit. It was this visit which had prompted his return to Djenan-el-Maqui.

"But I hope it won't be unsuccessful much longer," Charmian said, with deliberate graciousness.

"I hope so too, madame."

Something in his voice, a new tone, almost startled her. But she continued, without any change of manner:

"We must all hope for a great success."

"We, madame?"

"You and I and my husband."

Gillier bit his moustache and looked down. A heavy gloom seemed to have overspread him. After a moment he looked up, leaned back, as if determined to be at his ease, and said abruptly:

"Monsieur Sennier has completed a new opera. It is to be produced at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York some time next winter."

"Is it?"

Charmian tried to keep all expression out of her voice as she spoke.

"Since I last saw you, madame," Gillier continued, "I have managed to get a look at the libretto."

Without knowing that she did so Charmian leaned forward quickly and moved her hands.

"It does not approach my work, the work your husband bought from me for only one hundred pounds, in strength and drama."

"Your libretto is splendid. Mr. Lake and I have always thought so; and of course my husband agrees with us. But you know that."

Gillier pulled his thick moustache, looked quickly round the room, then at his hands, which he had abruptly brought down on his knees, and then at Charmian.

"I have reason to believe that Jacques Sennier—or rather Madame Sennier, for she read all the libretti sent in to him, and only showed him those she thought worth considering—that if Madame Sennier had seen the libretto I sold to your husband Sennier would have set mine—mine—in preference to the one he has set."

"Indeed!" said Charmian, with studied indifference.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, almost with violence.

"All this is very interesting. But I don't see what it has to do with me and my husband. You were good enough to offer to buy back your libretto from us last year. We refused. Our refusal—"

"Your refusal, madame! I never spoke about the matter to your husband. I never asked him."

"Have you come here now to ask him? Is that what you mean, monsieur?"

Gillier got up, throwing his cigarette end into the brass coffee tray. He was evidently much excited. As he stood up in front of her Charmian thought that he looked suddenly more common, coarser. He thrust his hands into the pockets of his black trousers.

"I must understand the position," he began.

"It is perfectly clear. Forgive me, monsieur, but I must say I think it rather bad taste on your part to return to a subject which has been finally disposed of and which is very disagreeable to me."

"Madame, I am here to say to you that I cannot consider it as finally disposed of till I have discussed it with Monsieur Heath. I came here prepared to make a proposition."

"It is useless."

"Madame, I trust that your husband is not endeavoring to avoid me."

Charmian got up and sharply clapped her hands. The Arab boy, Bibi, appeared.

"Bibi, ask monsieur to come," she said to him in French.

"*Bieng, madame,*" replied Bibi, who turned and walked softly away.

During the two or three minutes which elapsed before Claude came in Charmian and Gillier said nothing. Gillier, who, under the influence of excitement, was losing his veneer of good manners, moved about the room pretending to examine the few bibelots it contained. His face was flushed. He still kept his hands in his pockets. Charmian sat still in her corner, watching him. She was too angry to speak. And what was there to be said now? Although she had a good deal of will she was clever enough to realize when its exercise would be useless. She knew that she could do nothing more with this man. Otherwise she would not have sent for Claude.

"*V'là, Mousoul*"

Bibi had returned and gently pointed to his master, smiling.

"*Bon jour*, Gillier!" said Claude, as the Frenchman swung round sharply.

"*Bon jour!*"

They shook hands. Claude looked from Gillier to his wife.

"You were smoking?" he said, glancing at the tray. "Won't you have another cigarette?"

"*Merci!*"

"Anyhow, I will."

He picked up the cigarette box.

"We haven't seen you for a long while." He lit a cigarette. "Aren't you going to sit down?"

After a pause Gillier sat down. His eyes were fixed on Claude.

"I am glad you have come," he said. "Madame does not quite understand—"

"I understand perfectly, Monsieur Gillier," Charmian

interrupted. "Pray don't endow me with a stupidity which I don't possess."

"I prefer at any rate to explain the reason of my visit to Monsieur Heath, madame."

"Have you come with a special object then?" said Claude.

"Yes."

"By all means tell me what it is.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Gillier. "What is the good of a cloud of words between two men? I want to buy back the libretto I sold to you more than a year ago."

Charmian gazed at her husband. To her surprise his usually sensitive face did not show her what was passing in his mind. Indeed she thought it looked peculiarly inexpressive as he replied:

"Do you? Why?"

"Why? Because I don't think you and I are suited to work together. I don't think we could ever make a satisfactory combination in art. This has been my opinion ever since I was with you at Constantine."

"More than a year ago. And you only come here and say so now!"

Gillier was silent and fidgeted on the divan.

"Surely you must have some other reason?" said Claude in a very quiet, almost unnaturally quiet voice.

"That is one reason, and an excellent one. Another is, however, that if you will consent to sell me back my libretto I believe I could get it taken up by a man, a composer, who is more in sympathy with me and my artistic aims than you could ever be."

"I see. And what about all the months of work I have put in? What about all the music I have composed? Are you here to ask me to throw it away, or what?"

Gillier was silent.

"Surely your proposition isn't a serious one?" said Claude, still speaking with complete self-control.

"But I say it is! I say"—Gillier raised his voice—"that it is serious. I am a poor man, and I am sick of waiting for success. I sold my libretto to you in a hurry, not knowing what I was doing. Now I have a chance, a great chance, of

being associated with someone who is already famous, who would make the success of my libretto a certainty—"

"A chance, when your libretto is my property!" interrupted Claude.

"Oh, I know as well as you do that it's a hard thing to ask you to throw away all these months of labor! I don't think I could have done it, though in this world every man, every artist especially, must think of himself, if it wasn't for one thing."

"And that is—?"

"Your heart isn't in the work!" said Gillier defiantly, but with a curious air of conviction—the conviction of an acute man who had made a discovery which could not be contested or gainsaid.

"That's not true, Monsieur Gillier!" said Charmian, with hot energy.

Claude said nothing, and Giller continued, raising his voice:

"It is true. Your talent and mine are not fitted to be joined together, and you are artist enough to know it as well as I do. I haven't heard your music; but I can tell. I may be poor, I may be unknown—that doesn't matter! I've got the instinct that doesn't lie, can't lie. If I had known you as I do now, before I had sold my libretto, you never should have had it, even if you had offered me five hundred pounds instead of a hundred, and nobody else would have looked at it. With your temperament, with your way of thinking, you'll never make a success of it—never! I tell you that—I who am speaking to you!"

The veins in his temples swelled, and he frowned.

"Give me back my libretto and take back your money! Let me have my chance of success. Madame—she is hard! She cares nothing! But—"

"Monsieur, I must ask you to leave my wife's name out," said Claude.

And for the first time since he had come into the room he spoke with stern determination.

He had become very pale, and now looked strangely moved.

"I won't have her name brought in," he added. "This is my affair."

"Very well! Will you let me buy back my libretto?"

Charmian expected an instant stern refusal from her husband. But after Gillier's question there was a prolonged pause. She wanted to break it, to answer fiercely for Claude; but she did not dare to. For a moment something in her husband's look and manner dominated her. For a moment she was in subjection. She sat still staring at Claude, waiting for him to speak. He sat looking down, and it seemed to her as if he were wrestling as Jacob wrestled with the angel. His white forehead drew her eyes. She was filled with fear; but when he looked up at her the fear grew. She felt almost sick—sick with apprehension.

"Claude!" she said. "Oh, Claude!"

It seemed that his eyes had put a great question to her, and now her voice had answered it.

Claude turned to Armand Gillier.

"Monsieur," he said, "you can't have your libretto back. It's mine, and I'm going to keep it."

When Gillier was gone Charmian said, almost in a faltering voice, and with none of her usual self-possession of manner:

"How—how could you bear that man's insults as you did?"

"His insults?"

"Yes."

Claude looked at her in silence. And again she was conscious of fear.

"Don't let us ever speak of this again," he answered at last.

He went away.

That day he was in his workroom till very late. He did not come to tea. The evening fell; but he was not working on the opera. Charmian heard him playing Bach.

* * * * * * * *

At the end of April Alston Lake came once more to visit them.

Since those London days when they had first met him Lake had made great progress toward the fulfilment of his ambition. His energy and will were beginning to reap a good reward. He

was making money, enough money to live upon; but he had still to pay back his big debt to Jacob Crayford, had still to achieve his great desire, an appearance in Grand Opera. When he arrived at Djenan-el-Maqui he brought with him, as of old, an infectious atmosphere of enthusiasm. With his iron will he combined a light heart. He had none of the childishness that surprised, and sometimes charmed, in Jacques Sennier, but much that was boyish still pleasantly lingered with him. In him, too, there was something courageous that inspired courage in others.

This time he announced he could stay for a month if they did not mind. He wanted a thorough rest before the many concerts he was going to sing at during the London season. Both Charmian and Claude were delighted. When Claude heard of it he was silent for a moment. Then he began to reckon.

"The thirtieth to-day, isn't it? By a month do you mean a month or four weeks?"

"Well, four weeks, old chap!"

"That is less than a month."

"I wish it weren't. But I have to sing in London at the Bechstein Hall early in June. So I'm running it pretty close as it is."

"May the twenty-eighth you go, then," said Claude.

"That's it. But why these higher mathematics?"

Claude only smiled and went out of the room.

"What is he up to, Mrs. Charmian?" asked Lake mystified.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Does he want to get rid of me? Is that why he was so keen to know whether it was four weeks or a month?" said Lake, laughing.

"I am afraid that probably is it. But come up and see the flowers I've put in your room."

"This is a little Paradise," said Lake, in his ringing baritone voice. "Sometimes this winter in Paris, when I was all in, don't you know—"

"All in?"

"Blues."

"Oh, yes!"

"I'd think of Djenan-el-Maqui, and wish I was a composer instead of a singer—for a fifth of a minute."

"Oh!" she said reproachfully. "Only a fifth!"

"I know. It wasn't long. But you see I'm born to sing, so I'm bound to love it more than anything else. Making a noise—oh, it's rare!"

He opened his mouth and ran up a scale to the high A.

"I can get there pretty well now, don't you think?"

"Splendid! Your voice gets bigger and bigger!" she said, with real enthusiasm. "But it's almost—"

He stopped her.

"I know what you're going to say; but I shall always be a baritone. If you knew as much as I do about baritones turned into tenors, you'd say, 'Leave it alone, my boy!' and that's what I'm going to do. Now what about these flowers? It is good to be here."

Claude did not join Alston Lake in making holiday. Indeed, Charmian noticed that he was working much harder than usual, as if Lake's coming had been an incentive to him.

"I don't apologize to you, Alston," he said.

"Odd if you did when I was the first to try and set you on to an opera. Besides, you can't get ahead too fast now. There's—"

He stopped.

"Crayford'll be over this summer," he remarked, giving a casual tone to his voice.

"Ah!" said Claude.

And the conversation dropped.

Only in the early morning, and for an hour, or an hour and a half after lunch, did Claude intermit his labors. In the morning the three of them rode, on good horses hired from the Vitoz stables. After lunch they sat in the little court of the fountain, smoked and talked. Conversation never flagged when Alston was there. His young energy bred a desire for expression in those about him. And Charmian and Claude were now his most intimate friends. He identified himself with them in a charming way, was devoted to their fortunes, and assumed, without a trace of conceit, their devotion to his. When Claude, about three o'clock, got up and went away to

his workroom Alston often went off for a stroll alone. Between tea and dinner time, if Charmian had no engagement, she and Alston walked together in the scented Bois de Boulogne, past "Tananarivo," or drove down to the Jardin d'Essai, and spent an hour there near the shimmering sea.

In these many intimate hours Charmian learnt to appreciate the chivalry and delicacy peculiar to well-bred American men in their relations with women. Although she and Alston were both young, and she was an attractive woman, she felt as safe with him as if he were her brother. His life in Paris had left him entirely unspoiled, had even left him in possession of the characteristic and open-hearted naïveté which was one of his chief attractions, though he was quite unaware of it. She was very happy with Alston. But often she thought of Claude, far away on the hill, shut in, resigning all this freedom, this delicious open-air life, which she was enjoying with his friend.

"He's working almost too hard," she said one day when they were sitting in the Jardin d'Essai, "and he will work at night now. He never used to do that. Don't you think he's beginning to look rather white and worn out?"

She spoke with some anxiety.

"Sometimes he does look a bit tired," Alston allowed. "But a man's bound to when he puts his back into a thing. And there's not much doubt as to whether old Claude's back is in the opera. I say, Mrs. Charmian, how far has he got exactly?"

"Practically the whole of the music is composed, I believe. It's the orchestration that takes such a lot of time."

"Well, and how far has that got? Claude's never told me plump out. Composers never do. And I know better than to pump them. It's fatal—that! They simply can't stand it."

"I know. I believe the opera might be ready by the end of this year."

"Not before then?"

They looked at each other, then Charmian said:

"Oh, Alston, if you only knew how difficult it is to me to wait—to wait and not to show any impatience to him. Sometimes—well, now and then, I've shut myself in and cried with

impatience, cried angrily. I've wanted to bite things. One day I actually did bite a pillow."

She laughed, but her cheeks were flushed.

"It's the perpetual keeping it in that is such a torment. I know how wicked it would be to hurry him. And he does work so hard. And I've heard of people taking ten years over an opera. Claude only began about a year and five months ago. He's been marvellously quick, really. But, oh, sometimes I feel as if this suppressed impatience were making me ill, physically and mentally, as if it were a kind of poison stealing all through me! Can you understand?"

"Can I? You bet! I only wish the thing could be ready before Crayford goes back to the States."

"When does he go?"

"Some time in September, I believe. He goes on the Continent after July. Of course, July he's in London, June too. Then he has his cure at Divonne. If only— When do you come to London?"

Charmian suddenly grasped his arm.

"Alston, I'll keep him here, give up London, anything to have the opera finished by the end of August!"

"Well, but the heat!"

"I don't believe it's too hot upon the hill where we are, with all those trees. Every afternoon I expect there's a breeze from the sea. I know we could stand it. It's only April now. That would mean four solid months of steady work. But then?"

"I'd bring Crayford over."

"Would he come?"

"I'd make him."

"But we might—"

"No, Mrs. Charmian. He ought to hear it in Mustapha. I know him. He's a hard business man. But he's awfully susceptible too. And then he's great on scenic effects. Now, he's never been in Africa. Think of the glamour of it, especially in summer, when the real Africa emerges, by Gee, in all its blue and fire! We'd plunge him in it, you and I. That Casbah scene—you know, the third act! I'd take him there by moonlight on a September night—full moon—show him the women

on their terraces and in their courts, the town dropping down to the silver below, while the native music—by Gee! We'd dazzle him, we'd spread the magic carpet for him, we'd carry him away till he couldn't say no, till he'd be as mad on the thing as we are!"

"Oh, Alston, if we could!"

She had caught all his enthusiasm. It seemed to her that in North Africa Mr. Crayford could not refuse the opera. From that moment she had made up her mind. No London season! Whatever happened, she and Claude were going to remain at Djenan-el-Maqui till the opera was finished, finished to the last detail. That very evening she spoke about it to Claude.

"Claudie," she said. "Are you very keen on going to London this year?"

He looked at her as if almost startled.

"I? But, surely—do you mean that you don't want to go?"

She moved her head.

"Not one little bit."

"Well, but then where do you wish to go?"

"Where? Why should we go anywhere?"

"Stay here?"

"I've come to love this little house, the garden, even those absurd goldfish that are always looking for nothing."

"Well, but the heat!"

His voice did not sound reluctant or protesting, only a little doubtful and surprised.

"Lots of people stay. Algiers doesn't empty of human beings, only of travellers, because it's summer. And we are up on a height."

"That's true. And I could work on quietly."

"Absolutely undisturbed."

"The only thing is I meant to see Jernington."

Jernington was the professor with whom Claude studied orchestration in London.

"Get him over here."

"Jernington! Why, he never leaves London!"

"Get him to for a month. We'll pay all his expenses and everything, of course."

"How you go ahead!" he said, laughing. "You must be a twin of Alston's, I think."

"What has got to be done can be done."

"Well, but the expense; you know, Charmian, we live right up to our income."

"Hang the expense! Oh, as Alston would say!"

He laughed.

"You really are a marvellous wife!"

"Am I? Am I?"

"I might sound old Jernington. He'll think I'm raving mad, but still—"

"I only hope," she said, smiling and eager, "that he won't be so raving sane as to refuse."

"But what will Madre think, not seeing you—us, I mean?"

Charmian looked grave.

"Yes, I know. But Madre has never come to see us here."

"Oh, Charmian, there could never be a cloud between Madre and us!"

"No, no, never! Still, why has she never come?"

"She really hates the sea. You know she has never in her life done more than cross the Channel."

"Do you think that is the reason why she has never come?"

"How can I know?"

"Claude, Madre is strange sometimes. Don't you think so?"

"Strange? She is absolutely herself. She does not take anyone else's color, if that is what you mean. I love that in her."

"So do I. Still, I think she is strange."

At this moment Alston came in and the conversation dropped. But both husband and wife thought many times of "Madre" that day, and not without a certain uneasiness. Was the heart of the mother with them in their enterprise?

Charmian put that question to herself. But Claude did not put it. He thought of Mrs. Mansfield's intense and fiery eyes. They saw far, saw deep. He loved them, the look in them. But he must try to forget them. He must give himself to the enthusiasm of his wife and of Alston Lake.

He sent a long telegram to Jernington, saying how difficult it was for him to leave Mustapha, and begging Jernington to

come over during the summer so that they might work together in quiet. All expenses were to be paid. Next day he received a telegram from Jernington: "Very difficult is it absolutely impossible for you to come to England?"

"I'll answer that," said Charmian.

She telegraphed, "Absolutely impossible—HEATH."

In the late evening a second telegram came from Jernington: "Very well suppose I must come—JERNINGTON."

Charmian laughed as she read it over Claude's shoulder.

"The pathos of it," she said. "Poor old Jernington! He is horror-stricken. Bury St. Edmunds has been his farthest beat till now except for his year in Germany. Claudie, he loves the opera or he would never have consented to come. I felt it was a test. The opera, the child, has stood it triumphantly. I love old Jernington. And he is a first-rate critic, isn't he?"

"Of orchestration, certainly."

"That's half the battle in an opera. I feel so happy. Let us have an audition to-night!"

"All right," he said.

"And play us an act right through; the first act. Alston has only heard it in bits."

"I don't really care for anyone to hear it yet," Claude said, with obvious reluctance.

Yet he desired a verdict—of praise. He longed for encouragement. In old days, when he had composed for himself, he had felt indifferent to that. But now he was working on something which was planned, which was being executed, with the intention to strike upon the imagination of a big public. He was no longer indifferent. He was secretly anxious. He longed to be told that what he was doing was good.

That evening he was genuinely warmed by the enthusiasm of his wife and of Alston.

"And surely," he said to himself, "they would be inclined to be more critical than others, to be hypercritical."

He forgot that in some natures desire creates conviction.

On the last day of Alston's visit Charmian and he understood why Claude's mathematical powers had been brought to bear on the question of its exact duration. Claude himself explained with rather a rueful face.

"I hoped—I thought if you were going to stay for the extra days I might possibly have the finale of the opera finished. Even when you told me your month meant four weeks I thought I would have a tremendous try to complete it. Well, I have had a tremendous try. But I've failed. I must have two more weeks, I believe, before I conquer the monster."

He was looking very pale, had dark rings under his eyes, and moved his hands nervously while he was speaking.

"That was it!" exclaimed Alston.

"Yes, that was it."

Charmian and Alston exchanged a quick glance.

"When you've done the finale," Alston said, with the firmness of one who spoke with permission, even perhaps by special request, "will the opera be practically finished?"

"Finished? Good Heavens, no!"

"Well, but if it's the finale of the whole opera?" said Charmian.

"I've got bits here and there to do, and a lot to re-do."

Again Charmian and the American exchanged glances.

"I say, old chap," said Alston. "You read Balzac, don't you?"

"Of course. But what has that to do with the opera?"

"Did you ever read that story of his about a painter who was always striving to attain perfection, could never let a picture alone, was for ever adding new touches, painting details out and other details in? One day he called in his friends to see his masterpiece. When they came they found a mere mess of paint representing nothing."

"Well?" said Claude, rather stiffly.

"You've got a splendid talent. I hope you're going to trust it."

Claude said nothing, and Alston, in his easy, almost boyish way, glanced off to some other topic. But before he started for England he said to Charmian:

"Do watch him a bit if you can, Mrs. Charmian, for over-elaboration. Don't let him work it to death, I mean, till all the spontaneity is gone. I believe that's a danger with him. Somehow I think he lacks complete confidence in himself."

"You see it's the first time he has ever tried to do an opera."

"I know. It's natural enough. But do watch out for over-elaboration."

"I'll try to. But I have to be very careful with Claude."

"How d'you mean exactly?"

"He can be very reserved."

"Yes, but you know how to take him. And—well—we can't let the opera be anything but a big success, can we?"

If Claude had heard that "we!"

"I say, shall we walk around the garden?" Alston added, after a pause. "It isn't quite time to go, and I want to talk over things before Claude comes down to see the last of me."

"Yes, yes."

They went out, and descended the steps from the terrace.

"I wanted to tell you, Mrs. Charmian, that I'm going to bring Crayford over whatever happens, whether the opera's done or not. There's heaps ready for him to judge by. And you must read him the libretto."

"I?" exclaimed Charmian, startled.

"Yes, you. Study it up! Recite it to yourself. Learn to give it all and more than its value. That libretto is going to catch hold of Crayford right away, if you read it, and read it well."

When she had recovered from her first shock of surprise Charmian felt radiantly happy. She had something to do. Alston, with his shrewd outlook, was bringing her a step farther into this enterprise. He was right. She remembered Crayford. A woman should read him the libretto, and in a *décor*—swiftly her imagination began to work. The *décor* should be perfection; and her gown!

"How clever of you to think of that, Alston!" she exclaimed. "I'll study as if I were going to be an actress."

"That's the proposition! By Jove, you and I understand each other over this. I know Crayford by heart. We've got to what the French call '*éblouir*' him when we get him here. We must play upon him with the scenery proposition; what he can do in the way of wonderful new stage effects. When we've got him thoroughly worked up over the libretto and the scenery prop., we'll begin to let him hear the music, but not a moment before. We can't be too careful, Mrs. Charmian.

Crayford's a man who doesn't start going in a hurry on newly laid rails. He wants to test every sleeper pretty nearly. But once get him going, and the evening express from New York City to Chicago isn't in it with him. Now you and I have got to get him started before ever he comes to old Claude. In fact—"

He paused, put one finger to his firm round chin.

"But we can decide that a bit later on."

"That? What, Alston?"

"I was going to say it might be as well to get Claude out of the way for a day or two while we start on old Crayford here. I suppose it could be managed somehow?"

"Alston—" Charmian stopped on the path between the geraniums. "Anything can be managed that will help to persuade Mr. Crayford to accept Claude's opera."

"Right you are. That's talking! I'll think it all over and let you know."

"Oh," she exclaimed. "How I wish the end of August was here! You'll be in London. All your time will be filled up. You'll be singing, being applauded, *getting on*. And I have to sit here, and wait—wait."

"You'll be studying the libretto."

"So I shall!"

She sent him a grateful look.

"What a good friend you are to us, Alston!" she said, and there was heart at that moment in her voice.

"And haven't you been good friends to me? What about the studio? What about the Prophet's Chamber? Why, you've given me a sort of a home and family, you and old Claude. I can tell you I've often felt lonesome in Europe, I've often felt all in, right away from everybody, and my Dad trying to starve me out, and all my people dead against what I was doing. Since I've known you, well, I've felt quite bully in comparison with what it used to be. Claude's success and yours, it's just going to be my success too. And that's all there is to it."

He wrung her hand and shouted for Claude.

It was nearly time for him to go.

CHAPTER XXVI

JERNINGTON, after sending to Claude several anxious and indeed almost deplorable letters, pleading to be let off his bargain by telegram, arrived in Algiers in the middle of the following July, with a great deal of fuss and very little luggage.

The Heaths welcomed him warmly.

Although he was a native of Suffolk, and had only spent a year in Germany, he succeeded in looking almost exactly like a German student. Rather large and bulky, he had a quite hairless face, very fair, with Teutonic features, and a high forehead, above which the pale hair of his head was cropped like the coat of a newly singed horse. His eyes were pale blue, introspective and romantic. At the back of his neck, just above his low collar, appeared a neat little roll of white flesh. Charmian thought he looked as if he had once, consenting, been gently boiled. A flowing blue tie, freely peppered with ample white spots, gave a Bohemian touch to his pleasant and innocent appearance. He was dressed for cool weather in England, and wore boots with square toes and elastic sides.

In his special line he was a man of extraordinary talent.

He had intended to be a composer, but had little faculty for original work. His knowledge of composition, nevertheless, was enormous, and he was the best orchestral "coach" in England.

His heart was in his work. His devotion to a clever pupil knew no limits. And he considered Claude the cleverest pupil he had ever taught.

Charmian, therefore, accepted him with enthusiasm—boots, tie, little roll of white flesh, the whole of him.

He settled down with them in Mustapha, once he had been conveyed into the house, as comfortably as a cat in front of whom, with every tender precaution, has been placed a bowl of rich milk. In a couple of days it seemed as if he had always been there.

Charmian did not see very much of him. The two men toiled with diligence despite the great heat which lay over the land. They began early in the morning before the sun was high, rested and slept in the middle of the day, resumed work about five, and, with an interval for dinner, went on till late in the night.

The English Colony had long since broken up. Only the British Vice-Consul and his wife remained, and they lived a good way out in the country. Since May few people had come to disturb the peace of Djenan-el-Maqui. Charmian dwelt in a strange and sun-smitten isolation. She was very much alone. Only now and then some French acquaintance would call to see her and sit with her for a little while at evening in the garden, or in the courtyard of the fountain.

The beauty, the fierce romance of this land, sometimes excited her spirit. Sometimes, with fiery hands, it lulled her into a condition almost of apathy. She listened to the fountain, she looked at the sea which was always blue, and she felt almost as if some part of her nature had fallen away from her, leaving her vague and fragmentary, a Charmian lacking some virtue, or vice, that had formerly been hers and had made her salient. But this apathy did not last long. The sound of Jernington's strangely German voice talking loudly above would disturb it, perhaps, or the noise of chords or passages powerfully struck upon the piano. And immediately the child was with her again, she was busy thinking, planning, hoping, longing, concentrated on the future of the child.

She had studied the libretto minutely, had practised reading it aloud. It was of course written in French, and she found a clever woman, retired from a theatrical career in Paris, Madame Thénant, who gave her lessons in elocution, and who finally said that she read the libretto "*assez bien.*" This from Madame Thénant, who had played Dowagers at the Comédie Francaise, was a high compliment. Charmian felt that she was ready to make an effect on Jacob Crayford. She was in active correspondence with Alston Lake, who was still in London, and who had had greater success than before. From him she knew that Crayford was in town, and would take his usual "cure" in August at Divonne-les-Bains. Lake had

"begun upon him" warily, but had not yet even hinted at the visit to Africa. After his "cure" Crayford proposed making a motor tour. He thought nothing of running all over Europe in his car. Lake was going presently to speak of the perfect surfaces of the Algerian roads, "the best way perhaps of getting him to go to Algeria." He still wanted operas "badly," and had asked after the Heaths directly he arrived in London. Lake had replied that Claude was finishing off an opera. Was he? Where? Alston had evaded the question, giving the impression that Claude wished to remain hidden away. Thereupon Crayford had asked after Charmian, and had been informed that of course she was with her husband. Turtle doves, eh? Crayford had dropped the subject, but had eventually returned to it again in a casual way. Had Lake heard the opera? Some of it. Did it seem any good? Lake had not expressed an opinion. He had shrewdly made rather a mystery of the whole thing. This, as he expected, had put Crayford on the alert. Since the success of Jacques Sennier he saw the hand of his rival, "The Metropolitan," everywhere, like the giant hand of one of the great Trusts. Lake's air of mystery had evidently made him suspect that Claude had some reason for keeping away and making a sort of secret of what he was doing. Finally he had inquired point blank whether any one was "after young Heath's opera." Lake could not say anything as to that. "Why don't he write in Europe anyway, where folk could get at him if they wanted to?" had been the next question. Lake's answer had rather indicated that the composer was very glad to have a good stretch of ocean between himself and any "folk" who might want to get at him.

This was the point at which the Lake correspondence with Charmian stood in the first week of August. His last letter lay on her knee one afternoon, as she sat in a hidden nook at the bottom of the garden, with delicate bamboos rustling in a warm south wind about her.

Claude knew nothing of this exchange of letters, of all the planning and plotting. It was all for him. Some day, when the result was success, he should be told everything, unless by that time it was too late, and the steps to success were all forgotten. Charmian did nothing to disturb him. She

wished him to be obsessed by the work, to do it now merely for its own sake. The result of his labors would probably be better if that were so. If Crayford did come—and he must come! Charmian was willing it every day—his coming would be a surprise to Claude, and would seem to be a surprise to Charmian. She would get rid of Claude for a few days when Lake forewarned her that their arrival was imminent; would persuade him to take a little holiday, to go, perhaps, up into the cork woods to Hammam R'rirha. He was very pale, had dark circles beneath his eyes. The incessant work was beginning to tell upon him severely. Charmian saw that. But how could she beg him to rest now, when Jernington had come out, when it was so vital to their interests that the opera should be finished as soon as possible! Besides, she was certain that even if she spoke Claude would not listen to her. Jernington, so he said, always gave him an impetus, always excited him. It was a keen pleasure to show a man of such deep knowledge what he had been doing, a keener pleasure still when he approved, when he said, in his German voice, "That goes!" And they had been trying over passages with instrumentalists who had been "unearthed," as Jernington expressed it, in Algiers. They had got hold of a horn player, had found another man who played the clarinet, the violin, and a third instrument.

In fact, they were living for, and in, the opera. And Charmian, devoured by her secret ambition, had no heart to play a careful wife's part. She had the will to urge her man on. She had no will to hold him back. Afterward he could rest, he should rest—on the bed of his laurels.

She smiled now when she thought of that.

Presently she felt that some one was approaching her. She looked up and saw Jernington coming down the path, wiping his pale forehead with a silk handkerchief in which various colors seemed fortuitously combined.

"Is the work over?" she cried out to him.

He threw up one square-nailed white hand.

"No. But for once he has got a passage all wrong. I have left him to correct it. He kicked me out, in fact!"

Jernington threw back his head and laughed gutturally. His

laugh always contradicted his eyes. They were romantic, but his laugh was prosaic.

He sat down by Charmian and put his hands on his knees. One still grasped the handkerchief.

"Dear Mr. Jernington, tell me!" she said. "You know so much. Claude says your knowledge is extraordinary. Isn't the opera fine?"

Now Jernington was a specialist, and he was one of those men who cannot detach their minds from the subject in which they specialize in order to take a broad view. His vision was extraordinarily acute, but it was strictly limited. When Charmian spoke of the opera he believed he was thinking of the opera as a whole, whereas he was in reality only thinking about the orchestration of it.

"It is superb!" he replied enthusiastically. "Never before have I had a pupil with such talent as your husband."

With a rapid movement he put one hand to the back of his neck and softly rubbed his little roll of white flesh.

"He has an instinct for orchestration such as I have found in no one else. Now, for example—"

He flung himself into depths of orchestral knowledge, dragging Charmian with him. She was happily engulfed. When they emerged in about half an hour's time she again threw out a lure for general praise.

"Then you really admire the opera as a whole? You think it undoubtedly fine, don't you?"

Jernington wiped his perspiring face, his forehead, and, finally, his whole head and neck, manipulating the huge handkerchief in a masterly manner almost worthy of an expensive conjurer.

"It is superb. When it is given, when the world knows that the great Heath studied with me—well, I shall have to take a studio as large as the Albert Hall, there will be such a rush of pupils. Do you know that his employment of the oboe in combination with the flute, the strings being divided—"

And once more he plunged down into the depths of orchestral knowledge taking Charmian with him. He quoted Prout, he quoted Vincent d'Indy; he minutely compared passages in Elgar's second symphony with passages in Tchaí-

kovsky's fifth symphony; he dissected the delicate orchestral effects in Debussy's *Nuages* and *Fête Nocturne*, compared the modern French methods in orchestration with Richard Strauss's gigantic, and sometimes monstrous combinations. But again and again he returned to his pupil, Claude. As he talked his enthusiasm mounted. The little roll of flesh trembled as he emphatically moved his head. His voice grew harsher, more German. He untied and reknotted his flowing cravat, pulled up his boots with elastic sides, thrust his cuffs, which were not attached to his shirt, violently out of sight up his plump arms.

Charmian could not doubt his admiration for the opera. It was expressed in a manner peculiar to Jernington that became almost epileptic, but it was undoubtedly sincere.

When he left her and went back to Claude's workroom she was glowing with pride and happiness.

"That funny old thing knows!" she thought. "He knows!"

Jernington was usually called an old thing, although he was not yet forty.

His departure was due about the twentieth of August, but when that day drew near Claude begged him to stay on till the end of the month. Charmian was secretly dismayed. She had news from Lake that his campaign on Claude's behalf had every prospect of success. Crayford was now at Divonne-les-Bains, but had invited Lake to join him in a motor tour as soon as his "cure"—by no means a severe one—was over.

"That tour, Mrs. Charmian, as I'm a living man with good prospects, will end on the quay at Marseilles, and start again on the quay at Algiers. Crayford has tried to bring off a fresh deal with Sennier, but been beaten off by the pierrot in petticoats, as he calls the great Henriette. She asked for the earth, and all the planets and constellations besides. Now they are at daggers drawn. That's bully for us. Take out your bottom dollar, and bet it that I bring him over before September is ten days old."

September—yes. But Lake was impulsive. He might hurry things, might arrive with the impresario sooner. Jernington must not be at Djenan-el-Maqui when he arrived. If Claude were found studying with a sort of professor Cray-

ford would certainly get a wrong impression. It might just make the difference between the success of the great plan and its failure. Claude must present himself, or be presented by Lake as a master, not as a pupil.

She must get rid of old Jernington as soon as possible.

But it now became alarmingly manifest that old Jernington was in no hurry to go. He was one of those persons who arrive with great difficulty, but who find an even greater difficulty in bringing themselves to the point of departure. Never having been out of Europe before, it seemed that he was not unwilling to end his days in a tropical exile. He "felt" the heat terribly, but professed to like it, was charmed with the villa and the comfort of the life, and "really had no need to hurry away" now that he had definitely relinquished his annual holiday at Bury St. Edmunds.

As Claude wished him to stay on, and had no suspicion that any plan was in the wind, Charmian found herself in a difficult position as the days went by and the end of August drew near. Her imagination revolved about all sorts of preposterous means for getting rid of the poor fellow, whom she honestly liked, and to whom she was grateful for his enthusiastic labors. She thought of making a hole in his mosquito net, to permit the entry of those marauders whom he dreaded; of casually mentioning that there had been cases suspiciously resembling Asiatic cholera in the Casbah of Algiers; of pretending to fall ill and saying that Claude must take her away for a change; even of getting Alston Lake to send a telegram to Jernington saying that his presence was urgently demanded in his native Suffolk. Had he a mother? Till now Charmian had never thought of probing into Jernington's family affairs. When, driven by stress of circumstances, she began to do so, she found that his mother had died almost before he was born. Indeed, his relatives seemed to be as few in number as they were robust in constitution.

She dismissed the idea of the telegram. She even said to herself that of course she had never entertained it. But what was she to do?

She tried to be a little cold to Jernington, thinking it might be possible to convey to him subtly the idea that perhaps his

visit had lasted long enough, that his hostess had other plans in which his presence was not included.

But Jernington was conscious of no subtleties except those connected with the employment of musical instruments. And Charmian found it almost impossible to be glacial to such a simple and warm-hearted creature. His very boots seemed to claim her cordiality with their unabashed elastic sides. The way in which he pushed his cuffs out of sight appealed to the goodness of her heart, although it displeased her æsthetic sense. She had to recognize the fact that old Jernington was one of those tiresome people you cannot be unkind to.

Nevertheless she must get him out of the house and out of Africa.

If he stuck to the plan of leaving them at the end of August there would probably be no need of diplomacy, or of forcible ejection; but it had become obvious to Charmian that the last thing old Jernington was capable of doing was just that sticking to a plan.

"Do you mean to sail on the *Maréchal Bugeaud* or the *Ville d'Alger?*" she asked him.

"I wonder," he replied artlessly. "In my idea Berlioz was not really the founder of modern orchestration as some have asserted. Your husband and I—"

She could not stop him. She began to feel amost as if she hated the delicious orchestral family. Jernington had a special passion for the oboe. Charmian found herself absurdly feeling against that rustic and Arcadian charmer an enmity such as she had scarcely ever experienced against a human being. One night she spoke unkindly, almost with a warmth of malignity, about the oboe. Jernington sprang amorously to its defense. She tried to quarrel with him, but was disarmed by his fidelity to the object of his affections. She was too much a woman to rail against fidelity.

The 30th of August arrived. In the afternoon of that day she received the following telegram from Alston Lake:

"Crayford and I start motor trip to-morrow he thinks Germany have no fear all right Marseilles or I Dutchman.—LAKE."

As she read this telegram Charmian knew that the two men would come to Algiers. She believed in Alston Lake. He had an extraordinary faculty for carrying things through; and Crayford was fond of him. Crayford had been kind, generous to the boy, and loved him as a man may love his own good action. Lake, as he had said in private to Charmian, could "do a lot with dear old Crayford."

He would certainly bring Crayford to Mustapha. Old Jernington must go.

The 31st of August dawned and began to fade.

Charmian felt desperate. She resolved to tackle Claude on the matter. Old Jernington would never understand unless she said to him, "Go! For Heaven's sake, go!" And even then he would probably think that she was saying the reverse of what she meant, in an effort after that type of playful humor which, for all she knew, perhaps still prevailed in his native Suffolk. She had bent Claude to her purposes before. She must bend him to her purpose now.

"Claudie," she said, "you know what an old dear I think Jernington, don't you?"

Claude looked up at her with rather searching eyes. She had come into his workroom at sunset. All day she had been considering what would be the best thing to do. Old Jernington was strolling in the garden smoking a very German pipe after having been "at it" for many hours.

"Jernington?"

"Yes, old Jernington."

"Of course he's an excellent fellow. What about him?"

She sat down delicately. She was looking very calm, and her movement was very quiet.

"Well, I'm beginning almost to hate him!" she remarked quietly.

"What do you mean, Charmian?"

"If I tell you are you going to get angry?"

"Why should I get angry?"

"You are looking very fierce."

He altered his expression.

"It's the work," he muttered. "When one grinds as I do one does feel fierce."

"That's why I'm beginning to—well, love Mr. Jernington a little less than I used to. He's almost killing you."

"Jernington!"

"Yes. It's got to stop."

Her voice and manner had quite changed. She spoke now with earnest and very serious decision.

"What?"

"The work, Claude. I've seen for some time that unless you take a short holiday you are going to break down."

"Well, but you have always encouraged me to work!"

She noticed a faint suspicion in his expression and voice.

"I know. I've been too eager, too keen on the opera. I haven't realized what a strain you are going through. But—it's just like a woman, I'm afraid!—now I see another urging you on, I see plainly. It may be jealousy—"

"You jealous of old Jernington!"

"I believe I am a tiny bit. But, apart really from that, you are looking dreadful these last few days. When you asked Jernington to prolong his visit I was horrified. You see, he's come to it all fresh. And then he's not creating. That's the tiring work. It's all very well helping and criticising."

"That's very true," Claude said.

He sighed heavily. She had told him that he was very tired, and he felt that he was very tired.

"It is a great strain," he added.

"It has got to stop, Claude."

There was a little silence. Then she said:

"These extra months have made a great difference, haven't they?"

"Enormous."

"You've got on very far?"

"Farther than I had thought would be possible."

Her heart bounded. But she only said:

"There's a boat to Marseilles the day after to-morrow. Old Jernington is going by it."

"Oh, but Charmian, we can't pack the dear old fellow—"

"The dear old fellow is going by that boat, Claudie."

"But what a tyrant you are!"

"I've been selfish. My keenness about your work has

blinded me. Jernington has made me see. We've been two slave-drivers. It can't go on. If he could stay and be different —but he can't. He's a marvel of learning, but he has only one subject—orchestration. You've got to forget that for a little. So Jernington must go. Dear old boy! When I see your pale cheeks and your burning eyes I—I—"

Tears came into her eyes. From beneath the trickster the woman arose. Her own words touched her suddenly, made her understand how Claude had sacrificed himself to his work, and so to her ambition. She got up and turned away.

"Old Jernington shall go by the *Maréchal Bugeaud*," she said, in a voice that slightly shook.

And by the *Maréchal Bugeaud* old Jernington did go.

So ingeniously did Charmian manage things that he believed he went of his own accord, indeed that it had been his "idea" to go. She told Claude to leave it to her and not to say one word. Then she went to Jernington, and began to talk of his extraordinary influence over her husband. He soon pulled at his boots, thrust his cuffs up his arms, and showed other unmistakable symptoms of gratification.

"You can do anything with him," she said presently. "I wish I could."

Jernington protested with guttural exclamations.

"He's killing himself," she resumed. "And I have to sit by and see it, and say nothing."

"Killing himself!"

Jernington, who believed in women, was shocked.

"With overwork. He's on the verge of a complete breakdown. And it's you, Mr. Jernington, it's all you!"

Jernington was more than shocked. His gratification had vanished. A piteous, almost a guilty expression, came into his large fair face.

"Ach!" he exclaimed. "What have I done?"

"Oh, it's not your fault. But Claude almost worships you. He thinks there is no one like you. He's afraid to lose a moment of time while you are with him. Your learning, your enthusiasm excite him till he's beside himself. He can't rest with such a worker as you in the house, and no wonder. You are an inspiration to him. Who could rest with such an influ-

ence near? What are we to do? Unless he has a complete holiday he is going to break completely down. Do watch him to-day! Notice! See for yourself!

Jernington, much impressed—for Charmian's despair had been very definite indeed, "oleographic in type," as she acknowledged to herself—did notice, did see for himself, and inquired innocently of Charmian what was to be done.

"I leave that to you," she answered, fixing her eyes almost hypnotically upon him.

Secretly she was willing him to go. She was saying in her mind: "Go! Go! Go!" was striving to "suggestion" him.

"Perhaps—" he paused, and pulled his cuffs down over his large, pale hands.

"Yes?"

"Perhaps I had better take him away for a little holiday."

She could have slapped him. But she only said eagerly:

"To England, you mean! Why not? There's a boat going the day after to-morrow at noon, the *Maréchal Bugeaud*. Don't say a word to Claude. But take your passage on her and leave the rest to me. I know how to manage Claude. And if I get a little help from you!"

Old Jernington took his passage on the *Maréchal Bugeaud* and left the rest to Charmian, with this result. Late the next night, when they were all going to bed, she whispered to him, "I've put a note in your room. Don't say a word to him!" She touched her lips. Much intrigued by all this feminine diplomacy Jernington went to his room, and found the following note under a candlestick. (Charmian had a sense of the dramatic.)

"DEAR MR. JERNINGTON,—Claude *won't* go. It's no use for me to say anything. He is in a highly nervous state brought on by this overwork. I see the only thing is to let him have his own way in everything. Don't even mention that we had thought of this holiday in England. The least thing excites him. And as he *won't* go, what is the use of speaking of it? If I can get him to join you later well and good. For the moment we can only give in and be discreet. You have been

such a dear to us both. The house will seem quite different without you. *Not a word to Claude. Burn this!*

"C. H."

And old Jernington burnt it in the flame of the candle, and went away alone on the *Maréchal Bugeaud* the next morning, with apologies to Claude.

The house did seem to Charmian quite different without him.

CHAPTER XXVII

TWO days later, on the 4th of September, Charmian had got rid of Claude as well as of old Jernington, and, in a condition of expectation that was tinged agreeably with triumph, was awaiting the arrival of important visitors. She had received a telegram from Lake:

"Have got him into the Chateaux country going on to Orange hope on hope ever—ALSTON."

And she knew that the fateful motor would inevitably find its way to the quay at Marseilles.

She had had no difficulty in persuading Claude to go. When Jernington had departed Claude felt as if a strong prop had suddenly been knocked from under him, as if he might collapse. He could not work. Yet he felt as if in the little house which had seen his work he could not rest.

"Go away," Charmian said to him. "Take a couple of weeks' complete holiday."

"Where shall we go?"

"But I am not going."

He looked surprised. But she noticed that he did not look displeased. Nevertheless, thinking of the future and remembering Alston Lake's advice, she continued:

"You need a complete change of people as well as of place. Is there anyone left in Algiers?"

"If you don't come," he interrupted her quickly, "I'd much rather go quite alone. It will rest me much more."

She saw by the look in his eyes that this sudden prospect of loneliness appealed to him strongly. He moved his shoulders, stretched out his arms.

"Yes, it will do me good. You are right, Charmian. It is sweet of you to think for me as you do."

And he bent down and kissed her.

Then he hurried to his room, packed a very small trunk, and took the first train, as she had suggested, to Hammam R'rirha.

"If you move from there mind you let me know your address," she said, as he was starting.

"Of course."

"I want always to know just where you are."

"Of course I shall let you know. But I think I shall stay quietly at Hammam R'rirha."

Charmian had been alone for five days when another telegram came:

"Starting to-morrow for Algiers by the *Timgad* Hurrah—ALSTON."

She read that telegram again and again. She even read it aloud. Then she hurried to her room to get her copy of the libretto. Two days and they would be here! Her heart danced, sang. Everything was going well, more than well. The omens were good. She saw in them a tendency. Success was in the air. She did not doubt, she would not doubt, that Crayford's coming meant his eventual acceptance of the opera. The combination of Alston and herself was a strong one. They knew their own minds; they were both enthusiasts; they both had strong wills. Crayford was devoted to his protégé, and he admired her. She had seen admiration in his eyes the first time they had looked at her. Madame Sennier had surely never worked for her husband more strenuously and more effectively than she, Charmian, had worked for Claude; and she would work more strenuously, more effectively, during the next few days. The libretto! She snatched it up and sat down once more to study it. But she could not sit still, and she took it down with her into the garden. There she paced up and down, reading it aloud, reciting the strongest passages in it without looking at the words. She nearly knew the whole of it by heart.

When the day came on which the *Timgad* was due she was in a fever of excitement. She went about the little house re-arranging the furniture, putting flowers in all the vases. Of course Mr. Crayford and Alston would stay at a hotel. But no doubt they would spend a good deal of time at the villa. She would insist on their dining with her that night.

"Jeanne! Jeanne!"

She hurried toward the kitchen. It occurred to her that she was not supposed to know that the two men were coming. Oh, but of course, when he found them there, Claude would understand that naturally Alston had telegraphed from Marseilles. So she took "La Grande Jeanne" into her confidence without a scruple. They must have a perfect little dinner, a dinner for three such as had never yet been prepared in Mustapha!

She and Jeanne were together for more than an hour. Afterward she went out to watch for the steamer from a point of vantage on the Boulevard Bleu. Just after one o'clock she saw it gliding toward the harbor over the glassy sea. Then she went slowly home in the glaring heat, rested, put on a white gown, very simple but quite charming, and a large white hat, and went out into the Arab court with a book to await their arrival.

It was half-past four when a sound struck on her ears, a loud and trembling chord, a buzz, the rattle of a "cut-out." The blessed noises drew near. They were certainly in the little by-road which led to the house. They ceased. She did not move, but sat where she was with a fast-beating heart.

"Well, this is a cute little snuggery and no mistake!"

It was Crayford's voice in the court of the bougainvillea.

She bent her head and pored over her book. In a moment Alston Lake's voice said, in French:

"In the garden! No, don't call her, Bibi, we will find her!"

"Look well on the stage that boy!" said Crayford's voice. "No mistake at all about its being picturesque over here."

Then the two men came in sight in the sunshine. Instantly Alston said, as he took off his Panama hat:

"You got my wire from Marseilles, Mrs. Charmian?"

"Oh, yes, I was expecting you! But I didn't know when. Mr. Crayford, how kind of you to come over here in September! No one ever does."

She had got up rather languidly and was holding out her hand.

"Guess it's the proper time to come," said Crayford, squeezing her hand with his dried-up palm. "See a bit of the real

thing! I don't believe in tourist seasons at all. Tourists always choose the wrong time, seems to me."

By the look in his eyes as he glanced around him Charmian saw that he was under the spell of Djenan-el-Maqui.

"You must have tea, iced drinks, whatever you like," she said. "I'm all alone—as you see."

"What's that?" said Crayford.

"My husband is away."

Crayford's lips pursed themselves. For a moment he looked like a man who finds he has been "had." In that moment Charmian knew that his real reason in "running over" to North Africa had certainly been the opera. She did not suppose he had acknowledged this to Lake, or ever would acknowledge it to anyone. But she was quite certain of it.

"Gone to England?" asked Crayford, carelessly.

"Oh, no. He's been working too hard, and run away by himself for a little holiday to a place near here, Hammam R'irha. He'll be sorry to miss you. I know how busy you always are, so I suppose you'll only stay a day or two."

Crayford's keen eyes suddenly fastened upon her.

"Yes, I haven't too much time," he remarked drily.

They all sat down, and again Crayford looked around, stretching out his short and muscular legs.

"Cute, and no mistake!" he observed, with a sigh, as he pulled at the tiny beard. "Think of living here now! Pity I'm not a composer, eh, Alston?"

He ended with a laugh.

"And what's your husband been up to, Mrs. Heath?" he continued, settling himself more comfortably in his big chair, and pushing his white Homburg hat backward to leave his brown forehead bare to a tiny breeze which spoke softly, very gently, of the sea. "You've been over here for a big bunch of Sundays, Alston tells me, week-days too."

"Oh—" She seemed to be hesitating.

Alston's boyish eyes twinkled with appreciation.

"Well, we came here—we wanted to be quiet."

"You've got out of sight of Broadway, that's certain."

Tea and iced drinks were brought out. They talked of

casual matters. The softness of late afternoon, warm, scented, exotic, dreamed in the radiant air. And Crayford said:

"It's cute! It's cute!"

He had removed his hat now and almost lay back in his chair. Presently he said:

"Seems to me years since I've rested like this, Alston!"

"I believe it is many years," said Lake, with a little satisfied laugh. "I've never seen you do it before."

"'Cepting the cure. And that don't amount to anything."

"Stay and dine, won't you?" said Charmian. "If you're not bored."

"Bored!" said Crayford.

"We'll dine just as we are. I'll go in and see the cook about it."

"Very good of you I'm sure," said Crayford. "But I don't want to put you out."

"Where are you staying?"

"The Excelsior," said Lake.

"Right down in the town. You must stay. It is cooler here."

She got up and went slowly into the house.

"Stunning figure she's got and no mistake!" observed Crayford, following her with his eyes. "But I say, Alston, what about this fellow Heath? Now I'm over here I ought to have a look at what he's up to. She seemed to want to avoid the subject, I thought. D'you think he's writing on commission? Or perhaps someone's seen the music. The Metropolitan crowd—"

They fell into a long discussion on opera prospects, during which Alston Lake succeeded in giving Crayford an impression that there might be some secret in connection with Claude Heath's opera. This set the impresario bristling. He was like a terrier at the opening of a rat-hole.

Charmian's little dinner that night was perfect. Crayford fell into a seraphic mood. Beneath his hard enterprise, his fierce energies, his armor of business equipment, there was a strain of romance of which he was half-ashamed, and which he scarcely understood or was at ease with. That night it came rather near to the surface of him. As he stepped out into the

court to take coffee, with an excellent Havana in his mouth, as he saw the deep and limpid sky glittering with strong, almost fierce stars, and farther fainter stars, he heaved a long sigh.

"Bully!" he breathed. "Bully, and no mistake!"

Exactly how it all came about Charmian did not remember afterward; Alston, she thought, must have prepared the way with masterly ingenuity. Or perhaps she—no, she was not conscious of having brought it about deliberately. The fact was this. At ten o'clock that night, sitting with a light behind her, Charmian began to read the libretto of the opera to the two men who were smoking near the fountain.

It had seemed inevitable. The hour was propitious. They were all "worked up." The night, perhaps, played upon them after "La Grande Jeanne" had done her part. Crayford was obviously in his softest, most receptive mood. Alston was expansive, was in a gloriously hopeful condition. The opera was mentioned again. By whom? Surely by the hour or the night! It had to be mentioned, and inevitably was. Crayford was sympathetic, spoke almost with emotion—a liqueur-glass of excellent old brandy in his hand—of the young talented ones who must bear the banner of art bravely before the coming generations.

"I love the young!" he said. "It is my proudest boast to seek out and bring forward the young. Aren't it, Alston?"

Influenced perhaps by the satiny texture of the old brandy, in combination with the scented and jewelled night, he spoke as if he existed only for the benefit of the young, never thought about money-making, or business propositions. Charmian was touched. Alston also seemed moved. Claude was young. Crayford spoke of him, of his talent. Charmian was no longer evasive, though she honestly meant to be, thinking evasiveness was "the best way with Mr. Crayford." How could she, burning with secret eagerness, be evasive after a perfect dinner, when she saw the guest on whom all her hopes for the future were centered giving himself up almost greedily to the soft emotion which only comes on a night of nights?

The libretto was touched upon. Alston surely begged her to read it. Or did she offer to do so, induced and deliciously

betrayed into the definite by Alston? She and he were supposed to be playing into each other's hands. But, in that matter of the libretto, Charmian never was able to believe that they did so. The whole thing seemed somehow to "come about of itself."

Sitting with her feet on a stool, which she very soon got rid of, Charmian began to read, while Crayford luxuriously struck a match and applied to it another cigar. At that moment he was enjoying himself, as only an incessantly and almost feverishly active man is able to in a rare interval of perfect repose, when life and nature say to him "Rest! We have prepared this dim hour of stars, scents, silence, warmth, wonder for you!" He was glad not to talk, glad to hear the sound of a woman's agreeable voice.

Just at first, as Charmian read, his attention was inclined to wander. The night was so vast, so starry and still, that—as he afterward said to himself—"it took every bit of ginger out of me." But Charmian had not studied with Madame Thénant for nothing. This was an almost supreme moment in her life, and she knew it. She might never have another opportunity of influencing fate so strongly on Claude's behalf. Madame Sennier's white face, set in the frame of an opera-box, rose up before her. She took her feet off the stool—she was no odalisque to be pampered with footstools and cushions—and she let herself go.

Very late in the night Crayford's voice said:

"That's the best libretto since *Carmen*, and I know something about libretti."

Charmian had her reward. He added, after a minute:

"Your reading, Mrs. Heath, was bully, simply bully!"

Charmian was silent. Her eyes were full of tears. At that moment she was incapable of speech. Alston Lake cleared his throat.

"Say," began Crayford, after a prolonged pause, during which he seemed to be thinking profoundly, pulling incessantly at his beard, and yielding to a strong attack of the tic which sometimes afflicted him—"say, can't you get that husband of yours to come right back from wherever he is?"

With an effort, Charmian regained self-control.

"Oh, yes, I could, of course. But—but I think he needs the holiday he is taking badly."

"Been working hard has he, sweating over the music?"

"Yes."

"Young 'uns must sweat if they're to get there. That's all right. Aren't it, Alston?"

"Rather!"

"Can't you get him back?" continued Crayford.

The softness, the almost luxurious abandon of look and manner was dropping away from him. The man who has "interests," and who seldom forgets them for more than a very few minutes, began to reappear.

"Well, I might. But—why?"

"Don't he want to see his chum Alston?"

"Certainly; he always likes to see Mr. Lake."

"Well then?"

"The only thing is he needs complete rest."

"And so do I, but d'you think I'm going to take it? Not I! It's the resters get left. You might telegraph that to your husband, and say it comes straight from me."

He got up from his chair, and threw away the stump of the fourth cigar he had enjoyed that night.

"We've no room for resters in New York City."

"I'm sure you haven't. But my husband doesn't happen to belong to New York City."

As they were leaving Djenan-el-Maqui, after Mr. Crayford had had a long drink, and while he was speaking to his chauffeur, who had the bonnet of the car up, Alston Lake whispered to Charmian:

"Don't wire to old Claude. Keep it up. You are masterly, quite masterly. Hulloa! anything wrong with the car?"

When they buzzed away Charmian stood for a moment in the drive till silence fell. She was tired, but how happily tired!

And to think that Claude knew nothing, nothing of it all! Some day she would have to tell him how hard she had worked for him! She opened her lips and drew into her lungs the warm air of the night. She was not a "rester." She would not surely "get left."

Pierre yawned rather loudly behind her.

"Oh, Pierre!" she said, turning quickly, startled. "It is terribly late. Stay in bed to-morrow. Don't get up early. *Bonne nuit.*"

"*Bonne nuit, madame.*"

On the following day she received a note from Alston.

"DEAR MRS. CHARMIAN,—You are a wonder. No one on earth could have managed him better. You might have known him from the cradle—yours, of course, not his! I'm taking him around to-day. He wants to go to Djenan-el-Maqui, I can see that. But I'm keeping him off it. Lie low and mum's the word as to Claude.—Your fellow conspirator,

"ALSTON."

It was difficult to "lie low." But she obeyed and spent the long day alone. No one came to see her. Toward evening she felt deserted, presently even strangely depressed. As she dined, as she sat out afterward in the court with Caroline reposing on her skirt in a curved attitude of supreme contentment, she recalled the excitement and emotion of the preceding night. She had read well. She had done her part for Claude. But if all her work had been useless? If all the ingenuity of herself and Alston should be of no avail? If the opera should never be produced, or should be produced and fail? Perhaps for the first time she strongly and deliberately imagined that catastrophe. For so long now had the opera been the thing that ruled in her life with Claude, for so long had everything centered round it, been subservient to it, that Charmian could scarcely conceive of life without it. She would be quite alone with Claude. Now they were a *ménage à trois.* She recalled the beginnings of her married life. How fussy, how anxious, how unstable they had been! Now the current flowed strongly, steadily, evenly. The river seemed to have a soul, to know whither it was flowing.

Surely so much thought, care, labor and love could not be bestowed on a thing in vain; surely the opera, child of so many hopes, bearer of such a load of ambition, could not "go down"? She tried to regain her strength of anticipation. But all the evening she felt depressed. If only Alston would

come in for five minutes! Perhaps he would. She looked at the tiny watch which hung by her side at the end of a thin gold chain. The hands pointed to half-past nine. He might come yet. She listened. The night, one of a long succession of marvellous African nights, was perfectly still. The servants within the villa made no sound. Caroline heaved a faint sigh and stirred, turning to push her long nose into a tempting fold of Charmian's skirt. But, midway in her movement she paused, lifted her head, stared at the darkness with her small yellow eyes, and uttered a muffled bark which was like an inquiry. Her nose was twitching.

"What is it, Caroline?" said Charmian.

She lifted the dog on to her knees.

"What is it?"

Caroline barked faintly again.

"Someone is coming," thought Charmian. "Alston is coming."

Almost directly she heard the sound of wheels, and Caroline jumping down with her lopetty movement, delivered herself up to a succession of calm barks. She was a gentle individual, and never showed any great animation, even in such a crisis as this. The sound of wheels ceased, and in a moment a voice called:

"Charmian! Where are you?"

"Claude!"

She felt that her face grew hot, though she was alone, and she had spoken the name to herself, for herself.

"I'm out here on the terrace!"

She felt astonished, guilty. She had thought that he would only come when she summoned him, perhaps to-morrow, that he would learn by telegram of the arrival of Crayford and Alston. Now she would have to tell him.

He came out into the court, looking very tall in the night.

"Are you surprised?"

He kissed her.

"Very! Very surprised!"

"I thought I had had enough holiday, that I would get back. I only decided to-day, quite suddenly.

"Then didn't you enjoy your holiday?"

"I thought I was going to. I tried to. I even pretended to myself that I was enjoying it very much. But it was all subterfuge, I suppose, for to-day I found I must come back. The fact is I can't keep away from the opera."

Charmian was conscious of a sharp pang. It felt like a pang of jealousy.

"Have you had any dinner?" she asked, in a rather constrained voice.

"Yes. I dined at Gruber's."

She wondered why, but she did not say so.

"I nearly stayed the night in town. I felt—it seemed so absurd my rushing back like this."

He ended with a little laugh.

"Who do you think is here?" she said.

"Here?"

He glanced round.

"I mean in Algiers."

He looked at her with searching eyes.

"Someone we know well?"

"Two people."

"Tell me!"

"No—guess!"

"Women? Men?"

"Men."

"Sennier?"

She shook her head.

"Max Elliot?"

"No. One is—Alston Lake."

"Alston? But why isn't he up here, then?"

"He has brought someone with him."

"Whom?"

"Jacob Crayford."

"Crayford here? What has he come here for?"

"He's taking a holiday motoring."

"But to come to Algiers in summer!"

"He goes everywhere, and can't choose his season. He's far too busy."

"To be sure. Has he been to see you?"

"Yes; he dined here yesterday and stayed till past mid-

night. He wants to see you. I meant to telegraph to you almost directly."

"Wants to see me?"

"Yes. Claude, last night I read the libretto of the opera to him and Alston."

He was silent. It was dark in the court. She could not see his face clearly enough to know whether he was pleased or displeased.

"Do you mind?"

Why should I?"

"I think you sound as if you minded."

"Well? What did Crayford think of it?"

"He said, 'It's the best libretto since *Carmen*.'"

"It is a good libretto."

"He was enthusiastic. Claude"—she put her hand on his arm—"he wants to hear your music."

"Has he said so?"

"Not exactly; not in so many words; but he seemed very much put out when he found you weren't here. And, after he had heard the libretto, he suggested my telegraphing to you to come straight back."

"Funny I should have come without your telegraphing."

"It almost seems—" She paused.

"What?"

"As if you had been led to come back of your own accord, as if you had felt you ought to be here."

"Are you glad?" he said.

"Yes, now."

"Did you mean—"

"Claude," she said, taking a resolution, "I don't think it would be wise for us to seem too eager about the opera with Mr. Crayford."

"But I have never even thought—"

"No, no. But now he's here, and thinks so much of the libretto, and wants to see you, it would be absurd of us to pretend that he could not be of great use to us. I mean, to pretend to ourselves. Of course if he would take it it would be too splendid."

"He never will."

"Why not? Covent Garden took Sennier's opera."

"I'm not a Sennier unfortunately."

"What a pity it is you have not more belief in yourself!" she exclaimed, almost angrily.

She felt at that moment as if his lack of self-confidence might ruin their prospects.

"O Claude," she continued in the same almost angry voice, "do pluck up a little belief in your own talent, otherwise how can—"

She pulled herself up sharply.

"I can't help being angry," she continued. "I believe in you so much, and then you speak like this."

Suddenly she burst into tears. Her depression culminated in this breakdown, which surprised her as much as it astonished Claude.

"My nerves have been on edge all day," she said, or, rather, sobbed. "I don't know why."

But even as she spoke she did know why. The strain of secret ambition was beginning to tell upon her. She was perpetually hiding something, was perpetually waiting, desiring, thinking, "How much longer?" And she had not Susan Fleet's wonderful serenity. And then she could not forget Claude's remark, "I can't keep away from the opera." It ought to have pleased her, perhaps, but it had wounded her.

"I'm a fool!" she said, wiping her eyes. "I'm strung up; not myself."

Claude put his arm round her gently.

"I understand that my attitude about my work must often be very aggravating," he said. "But—"

He stopped, said nothing more.

"Let us believe in the opera," she exclaimed—"your own child. Then others will believe in it, too. Alston does."

She looked up at him with the tears still shining in her eyes.

"And Jacob Crayford shall."

After a moment she added:

"If only you leave him to me and don't spoil things."

"How could I spoil my own music?" he asked.

But she only answered:

"Oh, Claude, there are things you don't understand!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

"SO the darned rester's come back, has he?"

Crayford was the speaker. Dressed in a very thin suit, with a yellow linen coat on his arm, a pair of goggles in one hand, and a huge silver cigar-case, "suitably inscribed," in the other, he had just come into the smoking-room of the Excelsior Hotel.

"They gave you the note, then?" said Alston.

"Yaw."

Crayford laid the coat down, opened the cigar-case, and took out a huge Havana.

"I guess we'll let the car wait a bit, Alston," he said, lighting up. "Of course she telegraphed him to come."

"I'm quite sure she didn't," said Alston emphatically.

"Think I can't see?" observed Crayford drily.

He sat down and crossed his legs.

"No. But even you can't see what isn't."

"There's not much that is this eye don't light on. The little lady up at Djen-anne-whatever you may call it is following up a spoor; and I'm the big game at the end of it. She's out to bring me down, my boy. Well, that's all right, only don't you two take me for too much of an innocent little thing, that's all."

Alston said nothing, and maintained a cheerful and imperturbable expression.

"She's brought the rester back so as not to miss the opportunity of his life. Now I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going right up to Djen-anne. I'm going to take the rester by myself, and I'm just going to hear that darned opera; and neither the little lady nor you's going to get a look in. This is up to me, and you'll just keep right out of it. See?"

He turned the cigar in his mouth, and his tic suddenly became very apparent.

"And what am I to do?" asked Alston.

"When I get to Djen-anne, I'll open out at once, come right to business. You stop here. As likely as not the little lady'll come back in the car to take you for a spin. If she does, keep her out till late. You can tell her a good bit depends on it."

"Very well."

"Happen she'll dine with you?" threw out Crayford, always with the same half-humorous dryness.

"Do you mean that you wish me to try and keep Mrs. Heath to dinner?" said Alston, with bland formality.

"She might cheer you up. You might cheer each other up."

At this point in the conversation Crayford allowed a faint smile to distort slightly one corner of his mouth.

Charmian did come down from Mustapha in Crayford's big yellow car. She was in a state of great excitement.

"O Alston!" she exclaimed, "where are we going? What a man he is when it comes to business! He simply packed me off. I have never been treated in such a way before. We've got hours and hours to fill up somehow. I feel almost as if I were waiting to be told on what day I am to be guillotined, like a French criminal. How will Claude get on with him? Just think of those two shut in together!"

As Alston got into the car she repeated:

"Where are we going?"

"*Allez au Diable!*" said Alston to Crayford's chauffeur, who was a Frenchman.

"*Bien, m'sieu!*"

"And—" Alston pulled out his watch. "You must take at least seven hours to get there."

"*Très bien, m'sieu.*"

"That's a cute fellow," said Alston to Charmian, as they drove off. "Knows how to time things!"

It was evening when they returned to the hotel, dusty and tired.

"You'll dine with me, Mrs. Charmian!" said Alston.

"Oh, no; I must go home now. I can't wait any longer."

"Better dine with me."

She took off her big motor veil, and looked at him.

"Did Mr. Crayford say I was to dine with you?"

"No. But he evidently thought it would be a suitable arrangement."

"But what will people think?"

"What they always do, I suppose."

"Yes, but what's that?"

"I've wondered for years!"

He held out his big hand. Charmian yielded and got out of the car.

At ten o'clock Crayford had not reappeared, and she insisted on returning home.

"I can't stay out all night even for an impresario," she said.

Alston agreed, and they went out to the front door to get a carriage.

"Of course I'll see you home, Mrs. Charmian."

"Yes, you may."

As they drove off she exclaimed:

"That man really is a terror, Alston, or should I say a holy terror? Do you know, I feel almost guilty in daring to venture back to my own house."

"Maybe we'll meet him on the way up."

"If we do be sure you stop the carriage."

"But if he doesn't stop his?"

"Then I'll stop it. Keep a sharp lookout. I'm tired, but oh! I do feel so excited. You look out all the time on your side, and I'll do the same on mine."

"Well, but we meet everything on the—"

"Never mind! Oh, don't be practical at such a moment! He might pass us on any side."

Alston laughed and obeyed her mandate.

They were a long way up the hill, and were near to the church of the Holy Trinity when Charmian cried out:

"There's a carriage coming. I believe he's in it."

"Why?"

"Because I do! Be ready to stop him."

"Gee! He is in it! Hi! Mr. Crayford! Crayford!"

Charmian, leaning quickly forward, gave their astonished coachman a violent push in the small of his back.

"Stop! Stop!"

He pulled up the horses with a jerk.

"Hello!" said Crayford.

He took off his hat.

"Goin' home to roost?" he added to Charmian.

"If you have no objection," she answered, with a pretense of dignity.

They looked at one another in the soft darkness which was illumined by the lamps of the two carriages. Crayford, as usual, was smoking a big cigar.

"Have you dined?" said Alston.

"Not yet."

"Have you—" Charmian began, and paused. "Have you been hearing the opera all this time?"

"Yaw."

He blew out a smoke ring.

"Hearing it and talking things over."

Her heart leaped with hope and with expectation.

"Then you—then I suppose—"

"See here, little lady," said Crayford. "I'm not feeling quite as full as I should like. I think I'll be getting home along. Your husband will tell you things, I've no doubt. Want Lake to see you in, do you?"

"No. I'm almost there."

"Then what do you say to his coming back with me?"

"Of course. Good-night, Mr. Lake. No, no! I don't want you really! All the coachmen know me here, and I them. I've driven alone dozens of times. Good-night. Good-night, Mr. Crayford."

She almost pushed Alston out of the carriage in her excitement. She was now burning with impatience to be with Claude.

"Good-night, good-night!" she called, waving her hands as the horses moved forward.

"She's a oner," said Crayford. "And so are you to keep a woman like that quiet all these hours. My boy, I'm empty, I can tell you."

He said not a word to Alston about the opera that night, and Alston did not attempt to make him talk.

When Charmian arrived at Djenan-el-Maqui she found Claude in the little dining-room with Caroline, who was seated beside him on a chair, leaning her lemon-colored chin upon the table, and gazing with pathetic eyes at the cold chicken he was eating.

"O Claude!" she said, as he looked round. "Such a day! Well?"

She came to the table, pushed Caroline ruthlessly to the floor, took the dog's chair, and repeated, "Well?"

Claude's face was flushed, his short hair was untidy, and the eyes which he fixed upon her looked excited, tired, and, she thought, something else.

"Is anything the matter?"

"No, why should there be? Where have you been?"

"With Alston. He insisted on my keeping out of the way. Crayford I mean, of course. Has it gone well? Did you play the whole of it; all you've composed, I mean?"

"Yes."

"What did he say? What did he think of it?"

"It isn't easy to know exactly what that kind of man thinks."

"Was he disagreeable? Didn't you get on?"

"Oh, I suppose we did."

"What did he say, then?"

"All sorts of things."

"Go on eating. You look dreadfully tired. Tell me some of the things."

"Well, he liked some of it."

"Only some?"

"He seemed to like a good deal. But he suggested quantities of alterations."

"Where? Which part?"

"I should have to show you."

"Drink some wine. I'm sure you need it. Give me some idea. You can easily do that without showing me to-night."

"He says a march should be introduced. You know, in that scene—"

"I know, the soldiers, the Foreign Legion. Well, that would be easy enough. You could do that in a day."

"Do you think one has only to sit down?"

"Two days, then; a week if you like! You have wonderful facility when you choose. And what else? Here, I'll pour out the wine. What else?"

"Heaps of things. He wants to pull half the opera to pieces, I think."

"Oh, no, Claudie! You are exaggerating. You always do, dear old boy. And if you do what he says, what then?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Would he take it? Would he produce it?"

"He didn't commit himself."

"Of course not! They never do. But would he? You must have gathered something from his manner, from what he said, what he looked like."

"He seemed very much struck with the libretto. He said there were great opportunities for new scenic effects."

"He is going to take it! He is! He is!" she cried exultantly. "I knew he would. I always knew. Why, why do you look so grim, Claudie?"

She threw one arm round his neck and kissed him.

"Don't look like that when we are on the eve of everything we've been working for, waiting—longing for, for months and years! Caroline! Caroline!"

Caroline hastily indicated her presence.

"Come up! The darling, she shall have a piece of cake, two pieces! There! And the sugary part, too!"

"You'll make her ill."

"Never mind. If she is ill it is in a good cause. Claudie, just think, you are going to be another Jacques Sennier! It's too wonderful. And yet I knew it. Didn't I tell you that night in the opera house? I said it would be so. Didn't I? Can you deny it?"

"I don't deny it. But—"

"You are made of buts. If it were not for me you would go and hide away your genius, and no one would ever know you existed at all. It's pathetic. But you've married a wife who knows what you are, and others shall know too. The whole world shall know."

He could not help laughing at her wild enthusiasm. But he said, with a sobriety that almost made her despair:

"You are going too fast, Charmian. I'm not at all sure that I shall be able to consent to make changes in the opera."

Then began a curious conflict which lasted for days between Claude Heath on the one side, and Charmian, Alston Lake, and Crayford on the other. It was really a tragic conflict, for it was, Claude believed, the last stand made by an artist in defense of his art. Never had he felt so much alone as during these days of conflict. Yet he was in his own home, with a wife who was working for him, a devoted friend who was longing for his success, and a man who was seriously thinking of bringing him and his work into the notice of the vast world that loves opera. No one knew of his loneliness. No one even suspected it. And comedy hung, as it ever does, about the heels of tragedy.

Crayford revealed himself in his conflict. He was a self-made man, and before he "went in" for opera had been a showman all over the States, and had made a quantity of money. He had run a menagerie, more than one circus, had taken about a "fake-hypnotist," a "living-magnet," and other delights. Then he had "started in" as a music-hall manager. With music halls he had been marvellously successful. He still held interests in halls all over the States. More recently he had been one of the first men to see the possibilities in moving pictures, and had made a big pile with cinematograph halls. But always, even from the beginning, beneath the blatant cleverness, the vulgar ingenuities of the showman, there had been something else; something that had ambition not wholly vulgar, that had ideals, furtive perhaps, but definite, that had aspirations. And this something, that was of the soul of the man, was incessantly feeling its way through the absurdities, the vulgarities, the deceptions, the inanities, toward a goal that was worth the winning. Crayford had always wanted to be one of the recognized leaders of what he called "high-class artistic enterprise" in the States, and especially in his native city of New York. And he was ready to spend a lot of his "pile" to "get there."

Of late years he had been getting there. He had run a

fine theater on Broadway, and had "presented" several native and foreign stars in productions which had been remarkable for the beauty and novelty of the staging and "effects." And, finally, he had built an opera house, and had "put up" a big fight against the mighty interests concentrated in the New York Metropolitan. He had dropped thousands upon thousands of dollars. But he was now a very rich man, and he was a man who was prepared to lose thousands on the road if he reached the goal at last. He was a good fighter, a man of grit, a man with a busy brain, and a profound belief in his own capacities. And he was remarkably clever. Somehow he had picked up three foreign languages. Somehow he had learned a good deal about a variety of subjects, among them music. Combative, he would yield to no opinion, even on matters of which he knew far less than those opposed to him. But he had a natural "flair" which often carried him happily through difficult situations, and helped him to "win out all right" in the end. The old habit of the showman made him inclined to look on those whom he presented in his various enterprises as material, and sometimes battled with an artistic instinct which often led him to pick out what was good from the seething mass of mediocrity. He believed profoundly in names. But he believed also in "new blood," and was for ever on the lookout for it.

He felt pretty sure he had found "new blood" at Djenan-el-Maqui.

But Claude must trust him, bow to him, be ready to follow his lead of a long experience if he was to do anything with Claude's work. Great names he let alone. They had captured the public and had to be trusted. But people without names must be malleable as wax is. Otherwise he would not touch them.

Such was the man who entered into the conflict with Claude. Charmian was passionately on his side because of ambition. Alston Lake was on his side because of gratitude, and in expectation.

The opera was promising, but it had to be "made over," and Crayford was absolutely resolved that made over it should be in accordance with his ideas.

"I don't spend thousands over a thing unless I have my say in what it's to be like," he remarked, with a twist of his body, at a crisis of the conflict with Claude. "I wouldn't do it. It's me that is out to lose if the darned thing's a failure."

There was a silence. The discussion had been long and ardent. Outside, the heat brooded almost sternly over the land, for the sky was covered with a film of gray, unbroken by any crevice through which the blue could be seen. It was a day on which nerves get unstrung, on which the calmest, most equable people are apt to lose their tempers suddenly, unexpectedly.

Claude had felt as if he were being steadily thrashed with light little rods, which drew no blood, but which were gradually bruising him, bruising every part of him. But when Crayford said these last sentences it seemed to Claude as if the blood came oozing out in tiny drops. And from the very depths of him, of the real genuine man who lay in concealment, rose a lava stream of contempt, of rage. He opened his lips to give it freedom. But Charmian spoke quickly, anxiously, and her eyes travelled swiftly from Claude's face to Alston's, and to Crayford's.

"Then if we—I mean if my husband does what you wish, you *will* spend thousands over it?" she said, "you *will* produce it, give it its chance?"

Never yet had that question been asked. Never had Crayford said anything definite. Naturally it had been assumed that he would not waste his time over a thing in which he did not think of having a money interest. But he had been careful not to commit himself to any exact statement which could be brought against him if, later on, he decided to drop the whole affair. Charmian's abrupt interposition was a challenge. It held Claude dumb, despite that rage of contempt. It drew Alston's eyes to the face of his patron. There was a moment of tense silence. In it Claude felt that he was waiting for a verdict that would decide his fate, not as a successful man, but as a self-respecting artist. As he looked at the face of his wife he knew he had not the strength to decide his own fate for himself in accordance with the dictates of the hidden man within him. He strove to summon

up that strength, but a sense of pity, that perhaps really was akin to love, intervened to prevent its advent. Charmian's eyes seemed to hold her soul in that moment. He could not strike it down into the dust of despair.

Crayford's eyebrows twitched violently, and he turned the big cigar that was between his lips round and round. Then he took it out of his mouth, looked at Charmian, and said:

"Yah!"

Charmian turned and looked into Claude's eyes. She did not say a word. But her eyes were a mandate, and they were also a plea. They drove back, beat down the hidden man into the depths where he made his dwelling.

"Well," said Crayford roughly, almost rudely, to Claude, "how's it going to be? I want to know just where I am in this thing. This aren't the only enterprise I've got on the stocks by a long way. I wasn't born and bred a nigger, nor yet an Arab, and I can't sit sweltering here for ever trying to find out where I am and where I'm coming to. We've got to get down to business. The little lady is worth a ton of men, composers or not. She's got us to the point, and now there's no getting away from it. I'm stuck, dead stuck, on this libretto. Now, it's not a bit of use your getting red and firing up, my boy. I'm not saying a word against you and your music. But the first thing is the libretto. Why, how could you write an opera without a libretto? Just tell me that! Very well, then. You've got the best libretto since 'Carmen,' and you've got to write the best opera since 'Carmen.' Well, seems to me you've made a good start, but you're too far away from ordinary folk. Now, don't think I want you to play down. I don't. I've got a big reputation in the States, though you mayn't think it, and I can't afford to spoil it. Play for the center. That's my motto. Shoot to hit the bull's eye, not a couple of feet above it."

"Hear, hear!" broke in Lake, in his strong baritone.

"Ah!" breathed Charmian.

Crayford almost swelled with satisfaction at this dual backing. Again he twisted his body, and threw back his head with a movement he probably thought Napoleonic.

"Play for the center! That's the game. Now you're

aiming above it, and my business is to bring you to the center. Why, my boy"—his tone was changing under the influence of self-satisfaction, was becoming almost paternal—"all I, all we want is your own good. All we want is a big success, like that chap Sennier has made, or a bit bigger—eh, little lady? Why should you think we are your enemies?"

"Enemies! I never said that!" interrupted Claude.

His face was burning. He was perspiring. He was longing to break out of the room, out of the villa, to rush away—away into some desert place, and to be alone.

"Who says such things? No; but you look it, you look it."

"I can't help—how would you have me look?"

"Now, my boy, don't get angry!"

"Claudie, we all only want—"

"I know—I know!"

He clenched his wet hands.

"Well, tell me what you want, all you want, and I'll try to do it."

"That's talking!" cried Crayford. "Now, from this moment we know what we're up against. And I'll tell you what. Sitting here as we are, in this one-horse heat next door but one to Hell—don't mind me, little lady! I'll stop right there!—we're getting on to something that's going to astonish the world. I know what I'm talking about—'s going to astonish—the—world! And now we'll start right in to hit the center!"

And from that moment they started in. Once Claude had given way he made no further resistance. He talked, discussed, tried sometimes, rather feebly, to put forward his views. But he was letting himself go with the tide, and he knew it. He secretly despised himself. Yet there were moments when he was carried away by a sort of spurious enthusiasm, when the desire for fame, for wide success, glowed in him; not at all as it glowed in Charmian, yet with a warmth that cheered him. Out of this opera, now that it was being "made over" by Jacob Crayford, with his own consent, he desired only the one thing, popular success. It was not his own child. And in art he did not know how to share. He could only be really enthusiastic, enthusiastic in the soul of him, when the thing he had

created was his alone. So now, leaving aside all question of that narrow but profound success, which repays every man who does exactly what the best part of him has willed to do, Claude strove to fasten all his desire on a wide and perhaps shallow success.

And sometimes he was able, helped by the enthusiasm—a genuine enthusiasm—of his three companions, to be almost gay and hopeful, to be carried on by their hopes.

As his enthusiasm of the soul died Jacob Crayford's was born; for where Claude lost he gained. He was now assisting to make an opera; with every day his fondness for the work increased. Although he could be hard and business-like, he could also be affectionate and eager. Now that Claude had given in to him he became almost paternal. He was a sort of "Padre eterno" in Djenan-el-Maqui, and he thoroughly enjoyed his position. The more he did to the opera, in the way of suggestion of effects and interpolations, re-arrangement and transposition of scenes, cuttings out and writings in, the more firmly did he believe in it.

"Put in that march and it wakes the whole thing up," he would say; or "that quarrelling scene with the Spahis"—thought of by himself—"makes your opera a different thing."

And then his whole forehead would twitch, his eyes would flash, and he would pull the little beard till Charmian almost feared he would pull it off. He had returned to his obsession about the young. Frequently he reiterated with fervor that his chief pleasure in the power he wielded came from the fact that it enabled him to help the careers of young people.

"Look at Alston!" he would say. "Where would he be now if I hadn't got hold of his talent? In Wall Street eating his heart out. I met him, and I'll make him another Battistini. See here"—and he turned sharply to Claude—"I'll bring him out in your opera. That baritone part could easily be worked up a bit, brought forward more into the limelight. Why, it would strengthen the opera, give it more backbone. Mind you, I wouldn't spoil the score not for all the Alstons ever created. Art comes first with me, and they know it from Central Park to San Francisco. But the baritone part would bear strengthening. It's for the good of the opera."

That phrase "for the good of the opera" was ever on his lips. Claude rose up and went to bed with it ringing in his ears. It seemed that he, the composer, knew little or nothing about his own work. The sense of form was leaving him. Once the work had seemed to him to have a definite shape; now, when he considered it, it seemed to have no shape at all. But Crayford and Charmian and Alston Lake declared that it was twice as strong, twice as remarkable, as it had been before Crayford took it in hand.

"He's a genius in his own way!" Lake swore.

Claude was tempted to reply:

"No doubt. But he's not a genius in my way."

But he refrained. What would be the use? And Charmian agreed with Alston. She and Crayford were the closest, the dearest of friends. He admired not only her appearance, which pleased her, but her capacities, which delighted her.

"She's no rester!" he would say emphatically. "Works all the time. Never met an Englishwoman like her!"

Charmian almost loved him for the words. At last someone, and a big man, recognized her for what she was. She had never been properly appreciated before. Triumph burned within her, and fired her ambitions anew. She felt almost as if she were a creator.

"If Madre only knew," she thought. "She has never quite understood me."

While Claude was working on the new alterations and developments devised by Crayford—and he worked like a slave driven on by the expectations of those about him, scourged to his work by their desires—Lake studied the baritone part in the opera with enthusiasm, and Crayford and Charmian "put their heads together" over the scenery and the "effects."

"We must have it all cut and dried before I sail," said Crayford. "And I can't stay much longer; ought really have been back home along by now."

"Let me help you! I'll do anything!" she cried.

"And, by Gee! I believe you could if you set your mind to it," he answered. "Now, see here—"

They plunged deep into the libretto.

Crayford was resolved to astonish New York with his production of the opera.

"We'll have everything real," he said. "We'll begin with real Arabs. I'll have no fake-niggers; nothing of that kind."

That Arabs are not niggers did not trouble him at all. He and Charmian went down together repeatedly into the city, interviewed all sorts of odd people.

"I'm out for dancers to-day," he said one morning.

And they set off to "put Algiers through the sieve" for dancing girls. They found painters, and Crayford took them to the Casbah, and to other nooks and corners of the town, to make drawings for him to carry away to New York as a guide to his scenic artist. They got hold of a Fakir, who had drifted from India to North Africa, and Crayford engaged him on the spot to appear in one of the scenes and perform some of his marvels.

"Claude"—the composer was Claude to him now—"can write in something weird to go with it," he said.

And Charmian of course agreed.

It had been decided that the opera should be produced at the New Era Opera House some time in the New Year, if Claude carried out faithfully all the changes which Crayford demanded.

"He will. He has promised to do everything you wish," said Charmian.

"You stand by and see to it, little lady," said Crayford. "Happen when I'm gone, when the slave-driver's gone, eh, he'll get slack, begin to think he knows more about it than I do! He's not too pleased making the changes. I can see that."

"It will be all right, I promise you. Claude isn't so mad as to lose the chance you are offering him."

"It's the chance of a lifetime. I can tell you that."

"He realizes it."

"I'll tell you something. Only you needn't go telling everybody."

"I won't tell a soul."

"And watch out for the bodies, too. Well, I'm going to run Claude against Jacques Sennier. Mind you, I wouldn't

do it if it wasn't for the libretto. Seems to me the music is good enough to carry it, and it's going to be a lot better now I've made it over. Sennier's new opera is expected to be ready for March at latest. We'll produce ours"—Charmian thrilled at that word—"just about the same time, a day or two before, or after. I'll get together a cast that no opera house in this world or the next can better. I'll have scenery and effects such as haven't been seen on any stage in the world before. I'll show the Metropolitan what opera is, and I'll give them and Sennier a knock out, or I'm only fit to run cinematograph shows, and take about fakes through the one night stands. But Claude's got to back me up. I don't sign any contract till every note in his score's in its place."

"But you'll be in America when he finishes it."

"That don't matter. You're here to see he don't make any changes from what I've fixed on. We've got that all cut and dried now. It's only the writing's got to be done. I'll trust him for that. But there's not a scene that's to be cut out, or a situation to be altered, now I've fixed everything up. If you cable me, 'Opera finished according to decision,' I'll take your word, get out a contract, and go right ahead. You'll have to bring him over."

"Of course! Of course!"

"And I'll get up a boom for you both that'll make the Senniers look like old bones."

He suddenly twisted his body, stuck out his under jaw, and said in a grim and determined voice which Charmian scarcely recognized as his:

"I've got to down the Metropolitan crowd this winter. I've got to do it if I spend four hundred thousand dollars over it."

He stared at Charmian, and added after a moment of silence:

"And this is the only opera I've found that might help me to do it, though I've searched all Europe. So now you know just where we are. It's a fight, little lady! And it's up to us to be the top dogs at the finish of it."

"And we will be the top dogs!" she exclaimed.

From that moment she regarded Claude as a weapon in the fight which must be won if she were to achieve her great ambition.

CHAPTER XXIX

ON a January evening in the following year Claude and Charmian had just finished dinner, and Claude got up, rather slowly and wearily, from the small table which stood in the middle of their handsome red sitting-room on the eighth floor of the St. Regis Hotel in New York.

"How terribly hot this room is!" he said.

"Americans like their rooms hot. But open a little bit of the window, Claudie."

"If I do the noise of Fifth Avenue will come in."

He spoke almost irritably, like a man whose nerves were tired. But Charmian did not seem to notice it. She looked bright, resolute, dominant, as she replied in her clear voice:

"Let it come in. I like to hear it. It is the voice of the world we are here to conquer. Don't look at me like that, dear old boy, but open the window. The air will do you good. You're tired. I shouldn't have allowed you to work during the voyage."

"I had to work."

"Well, very soon you'll be able to rest, and on laurels."

Claude went to open the big window, pulling aside the blind, while Charmian lighted a cigarette, and curled herself up on the padded sofa. And as, in a moment, the roar of the gigantic city swelled in a fierce crescendo, she leaned forward with the cigarette in her hand, listening intently, half smiling, with an eager light in her eyes.

"What a city it is!" she said, as Claude turned and came toward her. "It makes London seem almost like a village. I'm glad it is here the opera is to be given for the first time."

"So am I," he said, sitting down.

But he spoke almost gloomily, looking at the floor. His face was white and too expressive, and his left hand, as it hung down between his knees, fluttered. He lifted it, turning the fingers inward.

"Why?" Charmian said.

He looked up at her.

"Oh, I—they are all strangers here."

She said nothing, and just then the telephone bell sounded. Mr. Alston Lake was below asking if Mr. Heath was in.

In a moment he entered, looking enthusiastic, full of cheerfulness and vitality, bringing with him an atmosphere which Charmian savored almost greedily, of expectation and virile optimism.

"My!" he said, as he shook them both by the hand. "You look settled in for the night."

"So we are," said Charmian.

Alston laughed.

"I've come to take you to the theater."

"But they're not rehearsing to-night," said Claude.

"No; but Crayford's trying effects."

"Mr. Crayford! Is he back from Philadelphia?" exclaimed Charmian.

"Been back an hour and hard at work already. He sent me to fetch you. They're all up on the stage trying to get the locust effect."

"The locusts! Wait a minute, Alston! I'll change my gown."

She hurried out of the room.

"Well, old chap, what's up? You don't look too pleased," said Alston to Claude as the door shut. "Don't you want to come out? But we must put our backs into this, you know. The fight's on, and a bully big fight it is. Seen the papers to-day?"

"No. I haven't had a minute. I've been going through the orchestration with Meroni."

"What does he say?"

"He was very nice," answered Claude evasively. "But what's in the papers?"

"A bit of news that's made Crayford bristle like a scrubbing brush. The Metropolitan's changed the date for the production of Sennier's new opera, put it forward by nearly a fortnight, pledged themselves to be ready by the first of March."

"What does it matter?"

"Well, I like that! It takes all the wind out of our sails. In a big race the getting off is half the battle. We were coming first. But if I know anything of Crayford we shall come first even now. It's all Madame Sennier. She's mad against Crayford and the opera and you, and she's specially mad against Mrs. Charmian. The papers to-night are full of a lot of nonsense about the libretto."

"Which libretto?"

"Yours. Apparently Madame Sennier's been saying it was really written for Sennier and had been promised to him."

"That's a lie."

"Of course it is. But she's spread herself on it finely, I can tell you. Crayford's simply delighted."

"Delighted, when I'm accused of mean conduct, of stealing another man's property."

"It's no use getting furious over our papers! Doesn't pay! Besides, it makes a story, works up public interest. Still, I think she might have kept out Mrs. Charmian's name."

"Charmian is in it?"

"Yes, a lot of rubbish about her hearing what a stunner the libretto was, and rushing over to Paris to bribe it away before Sennier had considered it in its finished state."

"How abominable! I shall—"

"I know, but I wouldn't. Crayford says it will give value to the libretto, prepare the public mind for a masterpiece, and help to carry your music to success."

"I see! With this and the locusts!"

He turned away toward the open window, through which came the incessant roar of traffic, the sound of motor horns, and now, for a moment, a chiming of bells from St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"Well, we must do all we know. We mustn't give away a single chance. The whole Metropolitan crowd is just crazy to down us, and we must put up the biggest fight we can. Leave it all to Crayford. He knows more than any living man about a boom. And he said just now Madame Sennier was a deed fool to have given us such a lift with her libel. There'll be a crowd of pressmen around at the theater about

it to-night, you can bet. Here she comes! Get on your coat, and let's be off, or Crayford'll be raging."

Claude stood still for an instant, looking from Alston to Charmian, who walked in briskly, wearing a sealskin coat that reached to her heels, and buttoning long white gloves. Then he said, "I won't be a minute!" and went out of the room.

As he disappeared Charmian and Alston looked after him. Then Alston came nearer to her, and they began to talk in rather low voices.

"The fight is on!"

How Claude hated those words; how he hated the truth which they expressed! To-night, in New York, as he went to fetch his overcoat from the smart and brilliantly lit bedroom which was opposite to the sitting-room across a lobby, he wondered why Fate had led him into this situation, why he had been doomed to become a sort of miserable center of intrigue, recrimination, discussion, praise, blame, dissension. No man, surely, on the face of the earth had loved tranquillity more than he had. Few men had more surely possessed it. He had known his soul and he had been its faithful guardian once—but long ago, surely centuries ago! That he should be the cause of battle, what an irony!

Thinking with great rapidity, during this brief interval of loneliness, while he got ready to go out, a rapidity to which his fatigue seemed to contribute, giving it wings, Claude reviewed his life since the first evening at Elliot's house. Events and periods and details flashed by; his close friendship with Mrs. Mansfield (who had refused to come to America), his almost inimical acquaintance with Charmian, Mrs. Shiffney's capricious endeavors to get hold of him, the firmness of his refusals, the voyage to Algiers, his regret at missing the wonders of Africa, Charmian's return full of a knowledge he lacked, the dinner during which he had looked at her with new eyes.

(He took down from its hook his heavy fur coat bought for the bitter winter of New York.)

Chateaubriand's description of Napoleon, the little island in Mrs. Grahame's garden, the production of Jacques Sennier's

opera—they were all linked together closely at this moment in a tenacious mind; with the expression in Charmian's eyes at the end of the opera, Oxford Street by night as he walked home, the spectral bunch of white roses on his table, the furtive whisper of the letter of love to Charmian as it dropped in the box, the watchful policeman, the noise of his heavy steps, the dying of the moonlight on the leaded panes of the studio, the scent of the earth as the dawn near drew.

Events and periods, and little details! And who or what had guided him through the maze of them? And whither was he going? Whither and to what was he hastening?

His marriage and the new life came back to him. He heard the maids whispering together on the stairs in Kensington Square, and the sound of the street organ in the frost. He saw the studio in Renwick Place, Charmian coming in with books of poetry in her hands. There, had been the beginning of that which had led to Algiers and now to New York, his abdication. There, he had taken the first step down from the throne of his own knowledge of himself.

He saw a gulf black beneath him.

But Charmian called:

"Claude, do make haste!"

He caught up hat and gloves and went out into the lobby. But even as he went, with an extraordinary swiftness he reviewed the incidents of his short time in America; the arrival in the cruel coldness of a winter dawn; the immensity of the city's aspect seen across the tufted waters, its towers—as they had seemed to him then—climbing into Heaven, its voices companioning its towers; the throngs of pressmen and photographers, who had gazed at him with piercing, yet not unkind, eyes, searching him for his secrets; the meeting with Crayford and Crayford's small army of helpers; publicity agents, business and stage managers, conductors, producers, machinists, typewriters, box-office people, scene painters, singers, instrumentalists. Their figures rushed across Claude's mind with a vertiginous rapidity. Their faces flashed by grimacing. Their hands beckoned him on in a mad career. And he saw the huge theater, a monster of masonry, with a terrific maw which he—he of all men!—was expected to fill,

a maw gaping for human beings, gaping for dollars. What a coldness it had struck into him, as he stood for the first time looking into its dimness as into the dimness of some gigantic cavern. In that moment he had realized, or had at least partially realized, the meaning of a tremendous failure, and how far the circles of its influence radiate. And he had felt very cold, as a guilty man may feel who hugs his secret. And the huge theater had surely leaned over, leaned down, filled suddenly with a sinister purpose, to crush him into the dust.

"Claude!"

"Here I am!"

"What a time you've been! We—are you very tired?"

"Not a bit. Come along!"

They went out into the corridor lined with marble, stepped into a lift, shot down, and passed through the vestibule to the street where a taxi-cab was waiting. A young man stood on the pavement, and while Charmian was getting in he spoke to Claude.

"Mr. Claude Heath, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I represent—"

"Very sorry I can't wait. I have to go to the theater."

He sprang in, and the taxi turned to the right into Fifth Avenue, and rushed toward Central Park. A mountain of lights towered up on the left where the Plaza invaded the starless sky. The dark spaces of the Park showed vaguely on the right, as the cab swung round. In front gleamed the golden and sleepless eyes of the Broadway district. The sharp frosty air quivered with a thousand noises. Motors hurried by in an unending procession, little gleaming worlds, each holding its group of strangers, gazing, gesticulating, laughing, intent on some unknown errand. The pavements were thronged with pedestrians, muffled to the ears and walking swiftly. The taxi-cab, caught in the maze of traffic, jerked as the chauffeur applied the brakes, and slowed down almost to walking pace. Under a lamp Claude saw a colored woman wearing a huge pink hat. She seemed to be gazing at him, and her large lips parted in a smile. In an instant she was gone. But Claude could not forget her. In his ex-

citement and fatigue he thought of her as a great goblin woman, and her smile was a terrible grin of bitter sarcasm stretching across the world. Charmian and Alston were talking unweariedly. Claude did not hear what they were saying. He saw snowflakes floating down between the lights, strangely pure and remote, lost wanderers from some delicate world where the fragile things are worshipped. And, with a strange emotion, his heart turned to the now remote children of his imagination, those children with whom he had sat alone by his wood fire on lonely evenings, when the pale blue of the flames had struck on his eyes like the soft notes of a flute on his ears, those children with whom he had kept long vigils and sometimes seen the dawn. How far they had retreated from him, as if they thought him a stern, or neglectful father! He shut his eyes, and seemed to see once more the smile of the goblin woman, and then the fiery gaze of Mrs. Mansfield.

"How could she say it? But I don't know that I mind!"

"Minding things doesn't help any in a place like New York."

"But will they believe it?"

"If they do half of them will think you worth while."

"Yes, but the other half?"

"As long as you get there it's all right."

The cab stopped at the stage door of Crayford's opera house.

As they went in two or three journalists spoke to them, asking for information about the libretto. Claude hurried on as if he did not hear them. His usual almost eager amiability of manner with strangers had deserted him this evening. But Charmian and Alston Lake spoke to the pressmen, and Alston's whole-hearted laugh rang out. Claude heard it and envied Alston.

From a room on the right of the entrance a very dark young man came carrying some letters.

"More letters!" he said to Claude, with a smile.

"Oh, thank you."

"They're all on the stage. The locusts will be real fine when they fix them right. We have folks inquiring about them all the time. Nothing like that in the Sennier opera."

He smiled again with pleasant boyishness. Claude longed to take him by the shoulders and say to him:

"It isn't a swarm of locusts that will make an opera!" But he only nodded and remarked:

"All the better for us!"

Then hastily he opened his letters. Three were from autograph hunters, and he thrust them into the pocket of his coat. The fourth was from Armand Gillier. When Claude saw the name of his collaborator he stood still and read the note frowning.

"Letters! Always letters!" said Charmian, coming up. "Anything interesting, Claudie?"

"Gillier is coming out after all."

"Armand Gillier!"

"Yes. Or—he arrived to-day, I expect, though this was posted in France. What day does the *Philadelphia*—"

"This morning," said Alston.

"Then he's here."

Charmian looked disgusted.

"It's bad taste on his part. After his horrible efforts to ruin the opera he ought to have kept away."

"What does it matter?" said Claude.

"He'll be interviewed on the libretto," said Alston. "Gee knows what he'll say, the beast!"

"If he backs up Madame Sennier in her libelous remarks it will be proclaiming that he can be bribed," exclaimed Charmian.

"I suppose he's bound to throw in his lot with us," added Alston, as they came into the huge curving corridor which ran behind the ground tier boxes.

"How dark it is! Claudie, give me your hand. It slopes, doesn't it?"

"Yes. The entrance is just here."

"How hot your hand is!"

"Here we are!" said Alston.

He pushed a swing door, and they came into the theater. It was dimly lighted, and over the rows of stalls pale coverings were drawn. The hundreds of empty boxes gaped. The distant galleries were lost in the darkness. It was a vast

house, and the faint light and the emptiness of it made it look even vaster than it was.

"The maw, and I am to fill it!" Claude thought again. And he was conscious of unimportance. He even felt as if he had never composed any music, as if he knew nothing about composition, had no talent at all. It seemed to him incredible that, because of him, of what he had done, great sums of money were being spent, small armies of people were at work, columns upon columns were being written in myriads of newspapers, a man such as Crayford was putting forth all his influence, lavishing all his powers of showman, impresario, man of taste, fighting man. He remembered the night when Sennier's opera was produced, and it seemed to him impossible that such a night could ever come to him, be his night. He thought of it somewhat as a man thinks of Death, as his neighbor's visitant not as his own.

"Chaw-*lee!*" shouted an imperative voice. "Chaw-ley! Chaw-*lee!*"

"Ah!" cried a thin voice from somewhere behind the stage.

"Get down that light! Give us your ambers! No, not the blues! Your ambers! Where's Jimber? I say, where is Jimber?

Mr. Mulworth, the stage producer, who was the speaker, appeared running sidewise down an uncovered avenue between two rows of stalls close to the stage. Although a large man, he proceeded with remarkable rapidity. Emerging into the open he came upon Claude.

"Oh, Mr. Crayford is here. He wants very much to see you."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere behind. I think he's viewing camels. Can you come with me?"

"Of course!"

He went off quickly with Mr. Mulworth, who shouted:

"I say, where is Jimber?" to some unknown personality as he ran toward a door which gave on to the stage.

"Let us go and sit down at the back of the stalls, Alston," said Charmian. "They don't seem to be trying the locusts yet."

"No. There are always delays. The patience one needs in a theater! Talk of self-control! Here, I'll pull away the—or shall we go to that box?"

"Yes. I'll get on this chair. Help me! That's it."

They sat down in a dark box at the back of the stalls. Far off, across a huge space, they saw the immense stage, lit up now by an amber glow which came not from the footlights but from above. The stage was set with a scene representing an oasis in the desert with yellow sand in the distance. Among some tufted palms stood three or four stage hands, pale, dusty, in shirt sleeves. At the extreme back of the scene, against the horizon, Mr. Mulworth crossed, with a thick-set, lantern-jawed, and very bald man, who was probably Jimber. Claude followed two or three yards behind them, and disappeared. His face looked ghastly under the stream of amber light.

"It's dreadful to see people on the stage not made up!" said Charmian. "They all look so corpse-like. O Alston, are we going to have a success?"

"What! You beginning to doubt!"

"No, no. But when I see this huge dark theater I can't help thinking, 'Shall we fill it?' What a fight art is! I never realized till now that we are on a battlefield. Alston, I feel I would almost rather die than fail."

"Fail! But—"

"Or quite rather die."

"In any case it couldn't be your failure."

She turned and looked at him in the heavy dimness.

"Couldn't it?"

"You didn't write the libretto. You didn't compose the music."

"And yet," she said, in a low tense voice, "it would be my failure if the opera failed, because but for me it never would have been written, never have been produced out here. Alston, it's a great responsibility. And I never really understood how great till I saw Claude go across the stage just now. He looked so—he looked—"

She broke off.

"Whatever is it, Mrs. Charmian?"

"He looked like a victim, I thought."

"Everyone does in that light unless—there's Crayford!"

At this moment Mr. Crayford came upon the stage from the side on which Claude had just vanished. He had a soft hat on the back of his head, and a cigar in his mouth.

"He doesn't!" whispered Charmian.

"Now go ahead!" roared Crayford. "Work your motors and let's see!"

There was a sound like a rushing mighty wind.

At two o'clock in the morning Crayford was still smoking, still watching, still shouting. Charmian and Alston were still in the darkness of the box, gazing, listening, sometimes talking. They had not seen Claude again. If he came into the front of the theater they meant to call him. But he did not come. The hours had flown, and now, when Alston looked at his watch and told Charmian the time, she could scarcely believe him.

"Where can Claude be?"

"I'll go behind."

"Jimber!" roared Mr. Crayford. "Where is Jimber?"

Mr. Mulworth, who looked now as if he had lain awake in his clothes for more nights than he cared to remember, rushed upon the stage almost fanatically.

"The locusts are all in one corner!" shouted Crayford. "What's the use of that? They must spread."

"Spread your locusts!" bawled Mr. Mulworth.

He lifted both his arms in a semaphore movement, which he continued until it seemed as if his physical mechanism had escaped from the control of his brain.

"Spread your locusts, Jimber!" he wailed. "Spread! Spread! I tell you—spread your locusts!"

He vanished, always moving his arms. His voice died away in the further regions.

Charmian was alone. She had nodded in reply to Alston's remark. To-night she felt rather anxious about Claude. She could not entirely rid her mind of the remembrance of him crossing under the light, looking unnatural, ghastly, like a persecuted man. And now that she was alone she felt as if she were haunted. Eager to be reassured, she fixed her eyes on the keen figure, the resolute face, of Mr. Crayford.

The power of work in Americans was almost astounding, she thought. All the men with whom she and Claude had had anything to do seemed to be working all the time, unresting as waves driven by a determined wind. Keenness! That was the characteristic of this marvellous city, this marvellous land. And it had acted upon her almost like electricity. She had felt charged with it.

It would be terrible to fail before a nation that worshipped success, that looked for it with resolute piercing eyes.

And she recalled her arrival with Claude in the cold light of early morning, her first sensation of enchantment when a pressman, with searching eyes and a firm mouth turned down at the corners, had come up to interview her. At that moment she had felt that she was leaving the dulness of the unknown life behind her for ever. It was no doubt a terribly vulgar feeling. She had been uneasily conscious of that. But, nevertheless, it had grown within her, fostered by events. For Crayford's publicity agent had been masterly in his efforts. Charmian and Claude had been snapshotted on the deck of the ship by a little army of journalists. They had been snapshotted again on the gangplank. In the docks they had been interviewed by more than a dozen people. A little later, in the afternoon of the same day, they had held a reception of pressmen in their sitting-room at the St. Regis Hotel. Charmian thought of these men now as she waited for Alston's return.

They had been introduced by Mr. Cane, Crayford's publicity agent, and had arrived about three o'clock. All of them were, or looked as if they were, young men, smart and alert, men who meant something. And they had all been polite and charming. They had "sat around" attentively, and had put their questions without brutality. They had seemed interested, sympathetic, as if they really cared about Claude's talent and the opera. His song, *Wild Heart of Youth*, had been touched upon, and a tall young man, with a pale face and anxious eyes, had told Charmian that he loved it. Then they had discussed music. Claude at first had seemed uncomfortable, almost too modest, Charmian had thought. But the pressmen had been so agreeable, so unself-conscious, that his discomfort had worn off. His natural inclination to please,

to give people what they seemed to expect of him, had come to his rescue. He had been vivacious and even charming. But when the pressmen had gone he had said to Charmian:

"Pleasant fellows, weren't they? But their eyes ask one for success. Till the opera is out I shall see those eyes, asking, always asking!"

And he had gone out of the room with a gesture suggestive of anxiety, almost of fear.

Charmian saw those eyes now as she sat in the box. What Claude had said was true. Beneath the sympathy, the charm, the frankness, the readiness in welcome of these Americans, there was a silent and strong demand—the demand of a powerful, vital country.

"We are here to make you known over immense distances to thousands of people!" the eyes of the pressmen had seemed to say. "But—produce the goods!" In other words, "Be a success!"

"Be a success! Be a success!" It seemed to Charmian as if all America were saying that in her ears unceasingly. "We will be kind to you. We will shower good-will upon you. We have hospitable hands, keen brains, warm hearts at your service. We only ask to give of our best to you. But—be a success! Be a success!"

And the voice grew so strong that at last it seemed almost stern, almost fierce in her ears. At last it seemed as if peril would attend upon non-compliance with its demand.

She thought of Claude crossing the stage under the amber light, she looked into the vast dim theater with its thousands of empty seats, and excitement and fear burned in her, mingled together. Then something determined in her, the thing perhaps which had enabled her to take Claude for her husband, and later to play a part in his art life, rose up and drove out the fear. "It is fear which saps the will, fear which disintegrates, fear which calls to failure." She was able to say that to herself and to cast fear away. And her mind repeated the words she had often heard Crayford utter, "It's up to us now to bring the thing off and we've just got to bring it off!"

"No, no, I tell you! They're too much on one side of the scene still! Who in thunder ever saw locusts swarming in a

corner when they've got the whole desert to spread themselves in? It aren't their nature. What? Well, then, you must alter the position of your motors. Where is Jimber?"

And Mr. Crayford strode behind the scenes.

Half-past two in the morning! What could Claude be doing? Was Alston never coming back? Charmian suddenly began to feel tired and cold. She buttoned her sealskin coat up to her throat. For a moment there was no one on the stage. From behind the scenes came no longer the clever imitation of a roaring wind. An abrupt inaction, that was like desolation, made the great house seem oddly vacant. She sat staring rather vaguely at the palms and the yellow sands.

After she had sat thus for perhaps some five minutes she saw Claude walk hastily on to the stage. He had a large black note-book and a pencil in his hand, and seemed in search of someone. Crayford came on brusquely from the opposite side of the scene and met him. They began to confer together.

The box door behind Charmian was opened and Alston came in.

"Old Claude's too busy to come. He wants me to take you home."

"What has he been doing all this time?"

"No end of things. It's just as I said. Crayford's determined to be first in the field. This move of the Metropolitan has put him on the run, and he'll keep everyone in the theater running till the opera's out. Claude's been with the pressmen behind, and having a hairy-teary heart to heart with Enid Mardon. Come, Mrs. Charmian!"

"But I don't like to leave Claude."

"There's nothing for us to do, and he'll follow us as soon as ever he can. I'll just leave you at the hotel."

"What was the matter with Miss Mardon?" Charmian asked anxiously, as she got up to go.

"Oh, everything! She was in one of her devil's moods to-night; wanted everything altered. She's a great artist, but as destructive as a monkey. She must pull everything to pieces as a beginning. So she's pulling her part to pieces now."

"How did Claude take it?"

"Very quietly. Tell the truth I think he's a bit tired out to-night."

"Alston," Charmian said, stopping in the corridor, "I won't go home without him. No, I won't. We must stick to Claude, back him up till the end. Take me into the stalls. I'm going to sit where he can see us."

"He'll send us away."

"Oh, no, he won't!" she replied, with determination.

The Madame Sennier spirit was upon her in full force.

CHAPTER XXX

IT was nearly four o'clock when they left the theater. Jacob Crayford, Mr. Mulworth and Jimber were still at work when they came out of the stage door into the cold blackness of the night and got into the taxi-cab. Alston said he would drive with them to the hotel and take the cab on to his rooms in Madison Avenue. But when they reached the hotel Claude asked him to come in.

"I can't go to bed," he said.

"But, Claudie, it's past four," said Charmian.

"I know. But after all this excitement sleep would be out of the question. Come in, Alston, we'll have something to eat, smoke a cigar, and try to quiet down."

"Right you are! I feel as lively as anything."

"It would be rather fun," said Charmian. "And I'm fearfully hungry."

At supper they were all unusually talkative, unusually, excitedly, intimate. Instead of "quieting down" Claude became almost feverishly vivacious. Although his cheeks were pale, and under his eyes there were dark shadows, he seemed to have got rid of all his fatigue.

"The climate here carries one on marvellously," he exclaimed. "When I think that I wanted to go to bed just before you came, Alston!"

He threw out his hand with a laugh. Then, picking up a glass of champagne, he added:

"I say, let us make a bargain!"

"What is it, old chap?"

"Let us—just us three—have supper together after the first performance. I couldn't stand a supper-party with a lot of semi-strangers."

"I'll come! Drink to that night!"

They drank.

Cigars were lit and talk flooded the warm red room.

Words rushed to the lips of them all. Charmian lay back on the sofa, with big cushions piled under her head, and Claude, sometimes walking about the room, told them the history of the night in the theater. They interrupted, put questions, made comments, protested, argued, encouraged, exclaimed.

Mr. Cane had brought pressman after pressman to interview Claude on the libretto scandal, as they called it. It seemed that Madame Sennier had made her libelous statement in a violent fit of temper, brought on by a bad rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera House. Annie Meredith, who was to sing the big rôle in Sennier's new opera, and who was much greater as an actress than as a vocalist, had complained of the weakness of the libretto, and had attacked Madame Sennier for having made Jacques set it. Thereupon the great Henriette had lost all control of her powerful temperament. The secret bitterness engendered in her by her failure to capture the libretto of Gillier had found vent in the outburst which, no doubt with plenty of amplifications, had got into the evening papers. The management at first had wished to attempt the impossible, to try to muzzle the pressmen. But their publicity agent knew better. Madame Sennier had been carried by temper into stupidity. She had made a false move. The only thing to do now was to make a sensation of it.

As Claude told of the pressmen's questions his mind burned with excitement, and a recklessness, such as he had never felt before, invaded him. He had been indignant, had even felt a sort of shame, when he was asked whether he had been "cute" in the libretto matter, whether he had stolen a march on his rival. Crayford's treatment of the affair had disgusted him. For Crayford, with his sharp eye to business, had seen at once that their "game" was, of course with all delicacy, all subtlety, to accept the imputation of shrewdness. The innocent "stunt" was "no good to anyone" in his opinion. And he had not scrupled to say so to Claude. There had been an argument—the theater is the Temple of Argument—and Claude had heard himself called a "lobster," but had stuck to his determination to use truth as a weapon in his defense. But now, as he told all this, he felt that he did not care either way. What did it matter if dishonorable conduct, if every

deadly sin, were imputed to him out here so long as he "made good" in the end with the work of his brain, the work which had led him to Africa and across the Atlantic? What did it matter if the work were a spurious thing, a pasticcio, a poor victim which had been pulled this way and that, changed, cut, added to? What did it matter if the locusts swarmed over it—so long as it was a success? The blatant thing—everyone, every circumstance, was urging Claude to snatch at it; and in this early hour of the winter morning, excited by the intensity of the strain he was undergoing, by the pull on his body, but far more by the pull on his soul, he came to a sudden and crude decision; at all costs the blatant thing should be his, the popular triumph, the success, if not of the high-bred merit, then of sheer spectacular sensation. There is an intimate success that seems to be of the soul, and there is another, reverberating, resounding, like the clashing of brass instruments beaten together. Claude seemed to hear them at this moment as he talked with ever-growing excitement.

One of the pressmen had mentioned Gillier, who had arrived and been interviewed at the docks. He had evidently been delighted to find his work a "storm center," but had declined to commit himself to any direct statement of fact. The impression left on the pressmen by him, however, had been that a fight had raged for the possession of his libretto, which must have been won by the Heaths since Claude Heath had set it to music. Or had the fight really been between Joseph Crayford and the management of the Metropolitan Opera House? Gillier had finally remarked, "I must leave it to you, messieurs. All that matters to me is that my poor work should be helped to success by music and scenery, acting and singing. I am not responsible for what Madame Sennier, or anyone else, says to you."

"Then what do they really believe?" exclaimed Charmian, raising herself up on the cushions, and resting one flushed cheek on her hand.

"The worst, no doubt!" said Alston.

"What does it matter?" said Claude.

Quickly he took out of a box, clipped, lit, and began to smoke a fresh cigar.

"What does anything matter so long as we have a success, a big, resounding success?"

Charmian and Alston exchanged glances, half astonished, half congratulatory.

"I never realized till I came here," Claude continued, "the necessity of success to one who wants to continue doing good work. It is like the breaths of air drawn into his lungs by the swimmer in a race, who, to get pace, keeps his head low, his mouth under water half the time. I've simply got to win this race. And if anything helps, even lies from Madame Sennier, and the sly deceit of Gillier, I mean to welcome it. That's the only thing to do. Crayford is right. I didn't see it at first, but I see it now. It's no earthly use the artist trying to keep himself and his talent in cotton wool in these days. If you've got anything to give the public it doesn't do to be sensitive about what people say and think. I had a lecture to-night from Crayford on the uses of advertisement which has quite enlightened me."

"What did he say?" interjected Alston.

"'My boy, if I were producing some goods, and it would help any to let them think I'd killed my mother, and robbed my father of his last nickel, d'you think I'd put them right, switch them on to the truth? Not at all! I'd get them all around me, and I'd say, "See here, boys, mother's gone to glory, and father's in the poorhouse, but it isn't up to me to say why. That's my affair. I know I can rely on you all to —keep my name before the public."'"

Charmian and Alston broke into laughter, but Claude's face continued to look grave and excited.

"The fact of the matter is that the work has got to come before the man," he said. "And now we've all got so far in this affair nothing must be allowed to keep us back from success. Let the papers say whatever they like so long as they talk about us. Let Madame Sennier rail and sneer as much as she chooses. It will be all to the good. Crayford told me so to-night. He said, 'My boy, it shows they're funky. They think our combination may be stronger than theirs.' It seems Sennier's new libretto has come out quite dreadfully at rehearsal, and they've been trying to re-write

a lot of it and change situations. Now, we got nearly everything cut and dried at Djenan-el-Maqui. By Jove, how I did work there! D'you remember old Jernington's visit, Charmian? He believed in the opera, didn't he?"

"I should think so!" she cried. "Why, he positively raved about it. And he's not an amateur. He only cares for the music—and he's a man who knows."

"Yes, he does know. What a change in our lives, eh, Charmian, if we bring off a big success! And you'll be in it Alston."

"Rather! The coming baritone!"

"What a change!"

His eyes shone with excitement.

"I used to be almost afraid of celebrity, I think. But now I want it, I need it. America has made me need it."

"This is the country that wakes people up," said Alston.

"It drives me almost mad!" cried Claude, with sudden violence.

"Claudie!" exclaimed Charmian.

"It does! There's something here that pumps nervous energy into one until one's body and mind seem to be swirling in a mill race. When I think of my life in Mullion House and my life here!"

Charmian, with a quick movement, sat upright on the sofa.

"Then you do realize—" she began, almost excitedly. She paused, gazing at Claude.

The two men looked at her.

"What is it?" Claude said at length, as she remained silent.

"You do realize that I did see something for you that you hadn't seen for yourself, when you shut yourself and your talent in, when you wouldn't look at, wouldn't touch the world?"

"Of course. I hadn't courage then. I dreaded contact with life. Now I defy life to get the better of me. I know it, and I'm beginning to know how to deal with it. I say, let us plan out our campaign if Madame Sennier persists in her accusations."

He sat down between them.

"But first tell us exactly what you gave out to the pressmen to-night," said Alston.

They talked till the dawn crept along the sky.

When at last Alston got up to go, Claude said:

"If three strong wills are worth anything we must succeed."

"And we've got Crayford's back of ours," said Alston, putting his arms behind him into the sleeves of his coat. "Good-morning! I'm really going."

And he went.

Charmian had got up from her sofa, and was standing by the writing-table, which was in an angle of the room on the right of the window. As Alston went out, her eyes fell on an envelope lying by itself a little apart from the letters with which the table was strewn. Scarcely thinking about what she was doing she stretched out her hand. Her intention was to put the envelope with its fellows. But when she took it up she saw that it had not been opened and contained a letter, or note, addressed to Claude.

"Why, here's a letter for you, Claudie!" she said, giving it to him.

"Is there? Another autograph hunter, I suppose."

Without glancing at the writing he tore the envelope, took out a letter, and began to read it.

"It's from Mrs. Shiffney!" he said. "She arrived to-day on the same ship as Gillier."

"I knew she would come!" cried Charmian. "Though they all pretended she was going to winter at Cap Martin."

"And she's brought Susan Fleet with her."

"Susan!"

"But read what she says. It seems to have all been quite unexpected, a sudden caprice."

"You poor thing!" said Charmian, looking at him with pitiful eyes. "When will you begin to understand?"

"What?"

"Us."

Claude sent a glance so keen that it was almost like a dart at Charmian. But she did not see it for she was reading the letter.

"The Ritz-Carlton Hotel,
Friday.

"Dear Mr. Heath,—I've just arrived with Susan Fleet on the *Philadelphia*. I heard such reports of the excitement over your opera out here that I suddenly felt I must run over. After all you told me about it at Constantine I'm naturally interested. Do be nice and let me into a rehearsal. I never take sides in questions of art, and though of course I'm a friend of the Senniers, I'm really praying for you to have a triumph. Surely the sky has room for two stars. What nonsense all this Press got-up rivalry is. Don't believe a word you see in the papers about Henriette and your libretto. She knows nothing whatever about it, of course. Such rubbish! Susan is pining to see her beloved Charmian. Can't you both lunch with us at Sherry's to-morrow at one o'clock? Love to Charmian.—Yours very sincerely,

Adelaide Shiffney."

"Well?" said Claude, as Charmian sat without speaking, after she had finished the letter. "Shall we go to Sherry's to-morrow?"

He spoke as if he were testing her, but she did not seem to notice it.

"Yes, Claudie, I think we will."

She looked at him.

"What are you thinking?" she asked quickly.

"Do you still believe Mrs. Shiffney tricked me at Constantine?"

"I know she did."

"And yet—"

She interrupted him.

"We are in the arena!"

"Ah—I understand."

"If we go to Sherry's, and Mrs. Shiffney speaks about coming to a rehearsal, what do you mean to do?"

"What do you think about it?"

"Of course she only wants to come in the hope of being able to carry a bad report to the Senniers."

Claude was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"That may be. But—we are in the arena."

"What is it?"

"You dislike Mrs. Shiffney, you distrust her, but you do think she has taste, judgment, don't you?"

"Yes—some."

"A great deal?"

"When she isn't biased by personal feeling. But she is biased against you."

Claude's eyes had become piercing.

"I think," he said, "that if I were with Mrs. Shiffney at a rehearsal I should divine her real, her honest opinion, the opinion one has of a thing whether one wishes to have it or not. If *she* were to admire the opera—" He paused. His face looked self-conscious.

"Yes?"

"I only mean that I think it might be the verdict in advance."

"I see," she said slowly. "Yes, I see."

She got up.

"We simply must go to bed."

"Come along then. But I feel as if I should never want to sleep again."

"We must sleep. The verdict in advance—yes, I see. But Adelaide might make a mistake."

"She really has a flair."

"I know. Oh, Claudie, the verdict!"

They were now in their bedroom. Charmian sighed and put her arms round his neck.

"The verdict!" she breathed against his cheek softly.

He felt moisture on his cheek. She had pressed wet eyes against it.

"Charmian, what is it? Why—"

"Hush! Just put your arms round me for a minute—yes, like that! Claudie, I want you to win, I want you to win. Oh, not altogether selfishly! I—I am an egoist, I suppose. I do care for my husband to be a success. But there's more than that. Yes, yes, there is!"

She held him, with passion, and suddenly kissed his eyes. She was crying quite openly now, but not unhappily.

"'CLAUDIE, I WANT YOU TO WIN, I WANT YOU TO WIN!'"—*Page 378*

"There's something in you far, far down, that I love," she whispered. "I am not always conscious of it, but I am now. It called me to you, I believe, at the very first. And I want that to win, I want that to win!"

Claude's face had become set. He bent over Charmian. For a moment he was on the verge of a strange confession. But something that still had great power held him back from it. And he only said:

"You have worked hard for me. If we do win it will be your victory."

"And if we lose?" she whispered.

"Charmian—" he kissed her. "We must try to sleep."

CHAPTER XXXI

ON a night of unnatural excitement Claude had come to a crude resolution. He kept to it, at first only by a strong effort, during the days and the nights which followed, calling upon his will with a recklessness he had never known before, a recklessness which made him sometimes feel hard and almost brutal. He was "out for" success on the large scale, and he was now fiercely determined to win it. Within him the real man seemed to recede like a thing sensitive seeking a hiding-place. Sometimes, during these strange and crowded days and nights, he felt as if he were losing himself in the turmoil around him and within him. And the wish came to him to lose himself, and to have done for ever with that self which once he had cherished, but which was surely of no use, of no value at all, in the violent blustering world.

Now and then he saw the pale shining of the lamp in the quiet studio, where he had dwelt with the dear children of his imagination; now and then he listened, and seemed to hear the silence there. Then the crowd closed about him, the noises of life rushed upon him, and the Claude Heath of those far-off days seemed to pass by him fantastically on the way to eternal darkness. And, using his will with fury, he cried out to the fugitive, "Go! Go!" as to something shameful that must not be seen.

Always he was suffering, as a man only suffers when he tries to do violence to himself, when he treats himself as an enemy. But when he had time he strove to sneer at his own suffering. Coolness, hardness, audacity, these were the qualities needed in life as he knew it now; swiftness not sensitiveness, boldness not delicacy. The world was not gentle enough for the trembling qualities which vibrate at every touch of emotion, giving out subtle music. And he would nevermore wish it gentle. Things as they are! Fall down and worship

them! Accommodate yourself to them lest you be the last of fools!

Claude acted, and carried on by excitement, he acted well. He was helped by his natural inclination to meet people halfway when he had to meet them. And he was helped, too, by the cordiality, the quickness of response, in those about him. Charmian did her part with an energy and brilliance to which the apparent change in him gave an impetus. Hitherto she had tried to excite in Claude the worldly qualities which she supposed to make for success. Now Claude excited them in her. His vivacity, his intensity, his power to do varied work, and especially the dominating faculty which he now began to display, sometimes almost amazed her. She said to herself, "I have never known him till now!" She said to Alston Lake, "Isn't it extraordinary how Claude is coming out?" And she began to look up to him in a new way, but with the worldly eyes, not with the mild or the passionate eyes of the spirit.

Others, too, were impressed by the change in Claude. After the luncheon at Sherry's Mrs. Shiffney said, with a sort of reluctance, to Charmian:

"The air of America seems to agree with your composer. Has he been on Riverside Drive getting rid of the last traces of the Puritan tradition? Or is it the theater which has stirred him up? He's a new man."

"There's a good deal more in Claude than people were inclined to suppose in London," said Charmian, trying to speak with light indifference, but secretly triumphing.

"Evidently!" said Mrs. Shiffney. "Perhaps, now that you've forced him to come out into the open, he enjoys being a storm-center, as they call it out here.

"Oh, but I didn't force him!"

"Playfully begged him not to come, I meant."

Claude was sitting a little way off talking to Susan Fleet. Mrs. Shiffney had "managed" this. She wanted to feel how things were through the woman. Then perhaps she would tackle the man. At lunch it had seemed to her as if success were in the air. Had she always been mistaken in her judgment of Claude Heath! Had Charmian seen more clearly and farther than she had? She felt more interested in Char-

mian than she had ever felt before, and disliked her, in consequence, much more than formerly. How Charmian would triumph if the Heath opera were a success! How unbearable she would be! In fancy Mrs. Shiffney saw Charmian enthroned, and "giving herself" a thousand airs. Mrs. Shiffney had never forgiven Charmian for taking possession of Claude. She did not hate her for that. Charmian had only got in the way of a whim. But Mrs. Shiffney disliked those who got in the way of her whims, and resented their conduct, as the spoilt child resents the sudden removal of a toy. Without hating Charmian she dearly wished for the failure of the great enterprise, in which she knew Charmian's whole heart and soul were involved. And she wished it the more on account of the change in Claude Heath. In his intensity, his vivacity, his resolution, she was conscious of fascination. He puzzled her. "There really is a great deal in him," she said to herself. And she wished that some of that "great deal" could be hers. As it could not be hers, unless her judgment of a man, not happily come to, and now almost angrily accepted, was at fault, she wished to punish. She could not help this. But she did not desire to help it.

Mrs. Shiffney separated from the Heaths that day without speaking of the "libretto-scandal," as the papers now called the invention of Madame Sennier. They parted apparently on cordial terms. And Mrs. Shiffney's last words were:

"I'm coming to see you one day in your eyrie at the Saint Regis. I take no sides where art is in question, and I want both the operas to be brilliant successes."

She had said not a word about the rehearsals at the New Era Opera House.

Charmian was almost disappointed by her silence. She had turned over and over in her mind Claude's words about the verdict in advance. She continued to dwell upon them mentally after the meeting with Mrs. Shiffney. By degrees she became almost obsessed by the idea of Mrs. Shiffney as arbiter of Claude's destiny and hers.

Mrs. Shiffney's position had always fascinated Charmian, because it was the position she would have loved to occupy. Even in her dislike, her complete distrust of Mrs. Shiffney,

Charmian was attracted by her. Now she longed with increasing intensity to use Mrs. Shiffney as a test.

Rehearsals of Claude's opera were being hurried on. Crayford was determined to produce his novelty before the Metropolitan crowd produced theirs.

"They've fixed the first," he said. "Then it's up to us to be ready by the twenty-eighth, and that's all there is to it. We'll get time enough to die all right afterward. But there aren't got to be no dying nor quitting now. We've fixed the locusts, and now we'll start in to fix all the rest of the cut-out."

He had begun to call Claude's opera "the cut-out" because he said it was certain to cut out Sennier's work. The rumors about the weakness of Sennier's libretto had put the finishing touch to his pride and enthusiasm. Thenceforth he set no bounds to his expectations.

"We've got a certainty!" he said. "And they know it."

His energy was volcanic. He knew neither rest nor the desire to rest. His season so far had been successful, much more successful than any former season of his. He knew that he was making way with the great New York public, and he was carried on by the vigor which flames up in a strong and determined man who believes himself to be almost within reach of the satisfaction of his greatest desire.

Claude, in his new character of the man determined to win a great popular triumph, appealed forcibly to Crayford.

"I've made him over!" he exclaimed to Charmian, almost with exultation. "He's a man now. When I lit out on him he was—well, well, little lady, don't you begin to fire up at me! All I mean is that Claude knows how to carry things with him now. Look how he's stood up against all the nonsense about the libretto! Why, he's right down enjoyed it. And the first night the pressmen started in he was like a man possessed, talked about his honor, and all that kind of rubbish. Now he says 'Stir it up! It's all for the good of the opera!' Cane's fairly mad about him, says he's on the way to be the best boom-center that ever made a publicity agent feel young. I'm proud of him! And he's moving all the time. He'll get there and no mistake!"

"I always knew Claude would rise to his chance if he got it," she said.

"He's got it now, don't you worry yourself. Not one man in a million has such a chance at his age. I tell you, Claude is a made man!"

A made man! Charmian felt a thrill at her heart. But again she longed for a verdict from outside, for a verdict from Mrs. Shiffney.

In the midst of the tumult of her life one day, very soon after the lunch at Sherry's, she begged Susan Fleet to come to see her. That day Claude and she had been with Gillier at the theater. As they had ignored Mrs. Shiffney's treachery in the affair of the libretto, so they had ignored Gillier's insulting behavior to them at Djenan-el-Maqui. Against his will he was with them now in the great enterprise. They had resolved to be charming to him, and had taken care to be so. And Gillier, delighted with the notoriety that was his, his conceit decked out with feathers, met them half-way. He was impressed by the situation which Crayford's powerful efforts had created for them. He was moved by the marked change in Claude. These people did not seem to him the same husband and wife he had known in the hidden Arab house at Mustapha. They had gained immeasurably in importance. Comment rained upon them. Conflict swirled about them. Expectations centered upon them. And they had the air of those upon whose footsteps the goddess, Success, is following. Gillier began to lose his regret for his lost opportunity. He was insensibly drawn to the Heaths by the spell of united effort. Now that Claude did not seem to care twopence for him, or for anyone else, Gillier began to respect him, to think a good deal of him. In Charmian he had always been aware of certain faculties which often make for success.

On the day when Charmian was expected to see Susan Fleet she had just come from an afternoon rehearsal which had gone well. Gillier had been almost savagely delighted with the performance of Enid Mardon, who sang and acted the rôle of the heroine. He knew little of music, but in the scene rehearsed Claude had introduced a clever imitation, if not an exact reproduction, of the songs of Said Hitani and his compan-

ions. This had aroused the enthusiasm of Gillier, who had a curious love of the country where he had spent the wild years of his youth. It had been evident both to Charmian and to Claude that he began to have great hopes of the opera. Charmian had become so exultant on noticing this that she had been unable to refrain from saying to Gillier, "Do you begin to believe in it?" As she sat now waiting for Susan she remembered his answer, "Madame, if the whole opera goes like that scene—well!" He had finished with a characteristic gesture, throwing out his strong hands and smiling at her. She almost felt as if she liked Gillier. She began to find excuses for his former conduct. He was a poor man struggling to make his way, terribly anxious to succeed. Madame Sennier had "got at" him. It was not unnatural, perhaps, that he had wished to associate himself with Jacques Sennier. Of course he had had no right to suggest the withdrawal of his libretto from Claude. That had been insulting. But still—that day Charmian found room in her heart for charity. She had not felt so happy, so safe, for a very long time. It was almost as if she held success in her hand, as a woman may hold a jewel and say, "It is mine!"

A slight buzzing sound told her that there was someone at the outer door of the lobby. In a moment Susan walked in, looking as usual temperate, kind, and absolutely unconscious of herself. She was warmly wrapped in a fur given to her by Mrs. Shiffney. When she had taken it off and sat down beside Charmian in the over-heated room, Charmian began at once to use her as a receptacle. She proceeded to pour her exultation into Susan. The rehearsal had greatly excited her. She was full of the ardent impatience of one who had been patient by force of will in defiance of natural character, and who now felt that a period was soon to be put to her suffering and that she was to enter into her reward. As, long ago, in an Algerian garden, she had used Susan, she used her now. And Susan sat quietly listening, with her odd eyes dropping in their sockets.

"Oh, Susan, do take off your gloves!" Charmian exclaimed presently. "You are going to stay a good while, aren't you?"

"Yes, if you like me to."

"I should like to be with you every day for hours. You do me good. We'll have tea."

She went to the telephone, came back quickly, sat down again, and continued talking enthusiastically. When the tea-table was in front of her, and the elderly German waiter had gone, she said:

"Isn't it wonderful? I shall never forget how you spoke of destiny to me when we were by the little island. It was then, I think, that I felt it was my fate to link myself with Claude, to help him on. Do you remember what you said?"

"That perhaps it was designed that you should teach Mr. Heath."

"Don't say mister—on such a day as this!"

"Claude, then."

"And, Susan, I don't want to seem vain, but I have taught him, I have taught him to know and rely on himself, to believe in himself, in his genius, to dominate. He's marvellously changed. Everyone notices it. You do, of course!"

"There is a change. And I remember saying that perhaps it was designed that you should learn from him. Do you recollect that?"

Charmian was handing Susan her tea-cup.

"Oh—yes," she said.

She looked at Susan as the latter took the cup with a calm and steady hand.

"What excellent tea!" observed Susan.

"Is it? Susan!"

"Well?"

"I believe you are very reserved."

"No, I don't think so."

"Yes, you keep half your thoughts about things and people entirely to yourself."

"I think most of us do that."

"About me, for instance! I've been talking a great deal to you in here. And you've been listening, and thinking."

There was an uneasy sound in Charmian's voice.

"Yes. Didn't you wish me to listen?"

"I suppose I did. But you've been thinking. What have you been thinking?"

"That it's a long journey up the ray," said Susan, with a sort of gentle firmness.

"Ah—the ray! I remember your saying that to me long ago."

"We've got a great deal to learn, I think, as well as to teach."

Charmian was silent for a minute.

"Do you mean that you think I only care to teach, that I —that I am not much of a pupil?" she said at length.

"Perhaps that is putting it too strongly. But I believe your husband had a great deal to give."

"Claude! Do you? But yes, of course—Susan!" Charmian's voice changed, became almost sharply interrogative. "Do you mean that Claude could teach me more than I could ever teach him?"

"It is impossible for me to be sure of that."

"Perhaps. But, tell me, do you think it is so?"

"I am inclined to."

Charmian felt as if she flushed. She was conscious of a stir of something that was like anger within her. It hurt her very much to think that perhaps Susan put Claude higher than her. But she controlled the expression of what she felt, and only said, perhaps a little coldly:

"It ought to be so. He is so much cleverer than I am."

"I don't think I mean that. It isn't always cleverness we learn from."

"Goodness then!"

Charmian forced herself to smile.

"Do you think me far below Claude from the moral point of view?" she added, with an attempt at laughing lightness.

"It isn't that either. But I think he has let out an anchor which reaches bottom, though perhaps at present he isn't aware of it. And I'm not sure that you ever have. By the way, I've a message from Adelaide for you."

"Yes?"

"She wants to know how your rehearsals are going."

"Wonderfully well, as I said."

Charmain spoke almost gravely. Her exultant enthusiasm had died away for the moment.

"And, if it is allowed, she would like to go to one. Can she?"

Charmian hesitated. But the strong desire for Mrs. Shiffney's verdict overcame a certain suddenly born reluctance of which she was aware, and she said:

"I should think so. Why not? Even a spy cannot destroy the merit of the enemy's work by wishing."

Susan said nothing to this.

"You must come with her if she does come," Charmian added.

She was still feeling hurt. She had looked upon Susan as her very special friend. She had let Susan see into her heart. And now she realized that Susan had criticized that heart. At that moment Charmian was too unreasonable to remember that criticism if often an inevitable movement of the mind which does not touch the soul to change it. Her attempt at cordiality was, therefore, forced.

"I don't know whether she will want me," said Susan. "But at any rate I shall be there for the first night."

"Ah—the first night!" said Charmian.

Again she changed. With the thought of the coming epoch in her life and Claude's her vexation died.

"It's coming so near!" she said. "There are moments when I want to rush toward it, and others when I wish it were far away. It's terrible when so much hangs on one night, just three or four hours of time. One does need courage in art. But Claude has found it. Yes, Susan, you are right. Claude is finer than I am. He is beginning to dominate me here, as he never dominated me before. If he triumphs—and he will, he shall triumph!—I believe I shall be quite at his feet."

She laughed, but tears were not far from her eyes. This period she was passing through in New York was tearing at her nerves with teeth and claws although she scarcely knew it.

Susan, who had seen clearly the hurt she had inflicted, moved, came nearer to Charmian, and gently took one of her hands.

"My dear," she said. "Does it matter so much which it is?"

"Matter! Of course it does. Everything hangs upon it —for us, I mean, of course. We have given up everything for the opera, altered our lives. It is to be the beginning of everything for us."

Susan looked steadily at Charmian with her ugly, beautiful eyes.

"Perhaps it might be that in either case," she said. "Dear Charmian, I think preaching is rather odious. I hope I don't often step into the pulpit. But we've talked of many things, of things I care for and believe in. May I tell you something I think with the whole of my mind, and even more than that as it seems to me?"

"Yes. Yes, Susan!"

"I think the success or failure only matters really as it affects character, and the relation existing between your soul and your husband's. The rest scarcely counts, I think. And so, if I were to pray about such a thing as this opera, pray with the impulse of a friend who really does care for you, I should pray that your two souls might have what they need, what they must be asking for, whether that is a great success, or a great failure."

The door opened and Claude came in on the two women.

"Did I hear the word failure?" he said, smiling, as he went up to Susan and took her hand. "Charmian, I wonder you allow it to be spoken in our sitting-room."

"I—I didn't—we weren't," she almost stammered. But quickly recovering herself, she said:

"Susan has come with a message from Adelaide Shiffney."

"You mean about being let in at a rehearsal?"

"Yes," said Susan.

"I've just been with Mrs. Shiffney. She called at the theater after you had gone, Charmian. I drove to the Ritz with her and went in."

Charmian looked narrowly at her husband.

"Then of course she spoke about the rehearsal?"

"Yes. Madame Sennier dropped in upon us. What do you think of that?"

Charmian thought that his face and manner were strangely hard.

"Madame Sennier! And did you stay, did you—"

"Of course. I thanked her for giving the opera such a lift with her slanders about the libretto. I tackled her. It was the greatest fun. I only wish Crayford had been there to hear me."

"How did she take it?" asked Charmian, glancing at Susan, and feeling uncomfortable.

"She was furious, I think. I hope so. I meant her to be. But she didn't say much, except that the papers were full of lies, and nobody believed them except fools. When she was going I gave her a piece of news to comfort her."

"What was that?"

"That my opera will be produced the night before her husband's."

Susan got up.

"Well, I must go," she said. "I've been here a long time, and daresay you both want to rest."

"Rest!" exclaimed Claude. "That's the last thing we want, isn't it, Charmian?"

He helped Susan to put on her fur.

"There's another rehearsal to-night after the performance of *Aïda*. You see it's a race, and we mean to be in first. I wish you could have seen Madame Sennier's face when I told her we should produce on the twenty-eighth."

He laughed. But neither Charmian nor Susan laughed with him. As Susan was leaving he said:

"You come from the enemy's camp, but you do wish us success, don't you?"

"I have just been telling Charmian what I wish you," answered Susan gently, with her straight and quiet look.

"Have you?" He wheeled round to Charmian. "What was it?"

Charmian looked taken aback.

"Oh—what was it?"

"Yes?" said Claude.

"The—the very best! Wasn't it, Susan?"

"Yes. I wished you the very best."

"Capital! Too bad, you are going!"

He went with Susan to the door.

When he came back he said to Charmian:

"Susan Fleet is very quiet, the least obtrusive person I ever met. But she's strange. I believe she sees far."

His face and manner had changed. He threw himself down in a chair and leaned his head against the back of it.

"I'm going to relax for a minute, Charmian. It's the only way to rest. And I shall be up most of the night."

He shut his eyes. His whole body seemed to become loose.

"She sees far, I think," he murmured, scarcely moving his sensitive lips.

Charmian sat watching his pale forehead, his white eyelids.

And New York roared outside.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE respective publicity agents of the two opera houses had been so energetic in their efforts on behalf of their managements, that, to the Senniers, the Heaths, and all those specially interested in the rival enterprises, it began to seem as if the whole world hung upon the two operas, as if nothing mattered but their success or failure. Charmian received all the "cuttings" which dealt with the works and their composers, with herself and Madame Sennier, from a newspaper clipping bureau. And during these days of furious preparation she read no other literature. Whenever she was in the hotel, and not with people, she was poring over these articles, or tabulating and arranging them in books. The Heaths, Claude Heath, Charmian Heath, Claude Heath's opera, Armand Gillier and Claude Heath, Madame Sennier's quarrel with Claude Heath, Mrs. Heath's brilliant efforts for her talented husband, Joseph Crayford's opinion of Mrs. Charmian Heath, how a clever woman can help her husband—was there really anything of importance in this world except Charmian and Claude Heath's energy, enterprise, and ultimate success?

From the hotel she went to the Opera House. And there she was in the midst of a world apart, which seemed to her the whole of the world. Everybody whom she met there was concentrated on the opera. She talked to orchestral players about the musical effects; to the conductor about detail, color, ensemble; to scene-painters about the various "sets," their arrangement, lighting, the gauzes used in them, the properties, the back cloths; to machinists about the locusts and other sensations; to the singers about their rôles; to dancers about their strange Eastern poses; to Fakirs about their serpents and their miracles. She lived in the opera, as the opera lived in the vast theater. She was, as it were, enclosed in a shell within a shell. New York was the great sea murmuring outside. And always it was murmuring of

the opera. In consequence of Jacob Crayford's great opinion of Charmian she was the spoilt child in his theater. Her situation there was delightful. Everybody took his cue from Crayford. And Crayford's verdict on Charmian was, "She's a wonderful little lady. I know her, and I say she's a peach. Heath did the cleverest thing he ever did in his life when he married her."

Charmian really had influence with Crayford, and she used it, revelling in a sense of her power and importance. He consulted her about many points in the performance. And she spoke her mind with decision, growing day by day in self-reliance. In the theater she was generally surrounded, and she grew to love it as she had never loved any place before. The romance and beauty of Djenan-el-Maqui were as nothing in comparison with the fascination of the Monster with the Maw, vast, dark, and patient, waiting for its evening provender. To Charmian it seemed like a great personality. Often she found herself thinking of it as sentient, brooding over the opera, secretly attentive to all that was going on in connection with it. She loved its darkness, the ghostly lightness of the covers spread over it, the ranges of its gaping boxes, the far-off mystery of its galleries receding into a heaven of ebon blackness. She wandered about it, sitting first here, then there, becoming intimate with the monster on whom she sometimes felt as if her life and fortunes depended.

"All this we are doing for you!" something within her seemed to whisper. "Will you be satisfied with our efforts? Will you reward us?"

And then, in imagination, she saw the monster changed. No longer it brooded, watched, considered, waited. It had sprung into ardent life, put off its darkness, wrapped itself in a garment of light.

"You have given me what I needed!" she heard it saying. "Look!"

And she saw the crowd!

Then sometimes she shut her eyes. She wanted to feel the crowd, those masses of souls in masses of bodies for which she had done so much. Always surely they had been keeping the ring for Claude and for her. And it seemed to her that,

unseen, they had circled the Isle in the far-off Algerian garden where she first spoke of her love and desire for Claude, that they had ever since been attending upon her life. Had they not muttered about the white house that held the worker? Had they not stared at the one who sat waiting by the fountain? Had they not seen the arrival of Jacob Crayford? Had they not assisted at those long colloquies when the opera which was for them was changed? Absurdly, she felt as if they had. And now, very soon, it would be for them to speak. And striving to shut her eyes more firmly, or pressing her fingers upon them, Charmian saw moving hands, a forest of them below, circles above circles of them, and in the distance of the gods a mist of them. And she saw the shining of thousands of eyes, in which were mirrored strangely, almost mystically, souls that Claude's music, conceived in patience and labor, had moved and that wished to tell him so.

She saw the crowd! And she saw it returning to listen again. And she remembered, with the extraordinary vitality of an ardent woman, who was still little more than a girl, how she had sat opposite to the white-faced, red-haired heroine on the first night of Jacques Sennier's *Paradis Terrestre;* how she had watched her, imaginatively entered into her mind, become one with her. That night Claude had written his letter to her, Charmian. The force in her, had entered into him, had inspired him to do what he did that night, had inspired him to do what he had since done always near to her. And soon, very soon, the white-faced, red-haired woman would be watching her.

Then something that was almost like an intoxication of the senses, something that, though it was born in the mind, seemed intimately physical, came upon, rushed over Charmian. It was the intoxication of an acute ambition which believed itself close to fulfilment. Life seemed very wonderful to her. Scarcely could she imagine anything more wonderful than life holding the gift she asked for, the gift something in her demanded. And she connected love with ambition, even with notoriety. She conceived of a satisfied ambition drawing two human beings together, cementing their hearts together, merging their souls in one.

"How I shall love Claude triumphant!" she thought exultantly, even passionately, as if she were thinking of a man new made, more lovable by a big measure than he had been before. And she saw love triumphant with wings of flame mounting into the regions of desire, drawing her soul up.

"Claude's triumph will develop me," she thought. "Through it I shall become the utmost of which I am capable. I am one of those women who can only thrive in the atmosphere of glory."

Claude triumphant, and made triumphant by her! She cherished that imagination. She became possessed by it.

Everything conspired to keep that imagination alive and powerful within her. Crayford was an enthusiast for the opera, and infected all those who belonged to him, who were connected with his magnificent theater, with his own enthusiasm. The scene-painter, who had, almost with genius, prepared exquisite Eastern pictures, was an enthusiast foreseeing that he would gain in the opera the triumph of his career. The machinist was "fairly wild" about the opera. Had he not invented the marvellous locust effect, which was to be a new sensation? Mr. Mulworth, by dint of working with fury and sitting up all night, had become fanatical about the opera. He existed only for it. No thought of any other thing could find a resting-place in his mind. His "production" was going to be a masterpiece such as had never before been known in the history of the stage. Nothing had been forgotten. He had brought the East to New York. It was inconceivable by him that New York could reject it. He spoke about the music, but he meant his "production." The man was a marvel in his own line, and such a worker as can rarely be found anywhere. He believed the opera was going to mark an epoch in the history of the lyric stage. And he said so, almost wildly, in late hours of the night to Charmian.

Then there was Alston, who was to have his first great chance in the opera, and who grew more fervently believing with each rehearsal.

The great theater was pervaded by optimism, which flowed from the fountain-head of its owner. And this optimism percolated through certain sections of society in New York,

as had been the case in London before Sennier's *Paradis Terrestre* was given for the first time.

Report of the opera was very good. And with each passing day it became better.

Charmian remembered what had happened in London, and thought exultantly, "Success is in the air."

It certainly seemed to be so. Rumor was busy and spoke kind things. Charmian noticed that the manner of many people toward her and Claude was becoming increasingly cordial. The pressmen whom she met gave her unmistakable indications that they expected great things of her husband. Two of them, musical critics both, came to dine with her and Claude one night at the St. Regis, and talked music for hours. One of them had lived in Paris, and was steeped in modernity. He was evidently much interested in Claude's personality, and after dinner, when they had all returned from the restaurant to the Heaths' sitting-room, he said to Charmian:

"Your husband is the most interesting English personality I have met. He is the only Englishman who has ever given to me the feeling of strangeness, of the beyond."

He glanced around with his large Southern eyes and saw that there was a piano in the room.

"Would he play to us, do you think?" he said, rather tentatively. "I am not asking as a pressman but as a keen musician."

"Claude!" Charmian said. "Mr. Van Brinen asks if you will play us a little bit of the opera."

Claude got up.

"Why not?" he said.

He spoke firmly. His manner was self-reliant, almost determined. He went to the piano, sat down, and played the scene Gillier had liked so much, the scene in which some of Said Hitani's curious songs were reproduced. The two journalists were evidently delighted.

"That's new!" said Van Brinen. "Nothing like that has ever been heard here before. It brings a breath of the East to Broadway."

Claude had turned half round on the piano stool. His eyes were fixed upon Van Brinen. And now Van Brinen looked

at him. There was an instant of silence. Then Claude swung round again to the piano and began to play something that was not out of the opera. Charmian had never heard it before. But Mrs. Mansfield had heard it.

"'I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. . . ."

"'The second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man. . . .

"'The fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. . . .

"'The sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the Kings of the East might be prepared. . . .

"'Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.'"

When Claude ceased there was a silence that seemed long. He remained sitting with his back to his wife and his guests, his face to the piano. At last he got up and turned, and his eyes again sought the face of Van Brinen. Then Van Brinen moved, clasped his long and thin hands tightly together, and said:

"That's great! That's very great!"

He paused, gazing at Claude.

"That's enormous!" he said. "Do you mean—is that from the opera?"

"Oh, no!" said Claude.

He came to sit down, and began to talk quickly of all sorts of things. When the two pressmen were about to go away Van Brinen said:

"I wish you success, Mr. Heath, as I have very seldom wished it for any man. For since I have heard some of your music, I feel that you deserve it as very few musicians I know anything of do."

Claude's face flushed painfully, became scarlet.

"Thank you very much," he almost muttered. But he wrung Van Brinen's thin hand hard, and when he was alone with Charmian he said:

"Of all the men I have met in New York that is the one I like best."

Van Brinen had considerable influence in the musical world of New York, and after that evening he used it on Claude's behalf. The members of the art circles of the city had Claude's name perpetually upon their lips. Articles began to appear which voiced the great expectation musicians were beginning to found upon Claude's work. The "boom" grew, and was no longer merely sensational, a noisy thing worked up by paid agents.

Charmian became quickly aware of this and exulted. Now and then she remembered her conversation with Susan Fleet and had a moment of doubt, of wonder. Now and then a fleeting expression in the pale face of her husband, a look in his eyes, a sound in his voice, even a movement, sent a slight chill through her heart. But these faintly disagreeable sensations passed swiftly from her. The whirling round of life took her, swept her on. She had scarcely time to think, though she had always time to feel intensely.

Often during these days of fierce preparation she was separated from Claude. He had innumerable things to do connected with the production. Charmian haunted the opera house, but was seldom actually with Claude there, though she often saw him on the stage or in the orchestra, heard him discussing points concerning his work. And Claude was very often away, when rehearsals did not demand his attention, visiting the singers who were to appear in the opera, going through their rôles with them, trying to imbue them with his exact meaning. Charmian meanwhile was with some of the many friends she had made in New York.

Thus it happened that Claude was able to meet Mrs. Shiffney several times without Charmian's knowledge.

It was an understood thing—and Charmian knew this—that Mrs. Shiffney was to come to the first full rehearsal of the opera. The verdict in advance was to be given and taken. Mrs. Shiffney had called once at the St. Regis, when Claude was out, and had sat for ten minutes with Charmian. And Charmian had called upon her at the Ritz-Carlton and had not found her. Here matters had ended in connection with

"Adelaide," so far as Charmian knew. Mrs. Shiffney had multitudes of friends in New York, and was always rushing about. It never occurred to Charmian that she had any time to give to Claude, or that Claude had any time to give to her. But Mrs. Shiffney always found time to do anything she really cared to do. And just now she cared to meet Claude.

Long ago in London, when he was very genuine, she had been attracted by him. Now, in New York, when he was dressed up in motley, with painted face and eyes that strove, though sometimes in vain, to be false, he fascinated her. The new Claude, harder, more dominant, secretly unhappy, feverish with a burning excitement of soul and brain, appealed to this woman who loved all that was strange, exotic, who hated and despised the commonplace, and who lived on excitement.

She threw out one or two lures for Claude, and he, who in London had refused her invitations, in New York accepted them. Why did he do this? Because he had flung away his real self, because he was secretly angry with, hated the self to which he was giving the rein, because he, too, during this period was living on excitement, because he longed sometimes, with a cruel longing, to raise up a barrier between himself and Charmian.

And perhaps there were other reasons that only a physician could have explained, reasons connected with tired and irritated nerves, with a brain upon which an unnatural strain had been put. The overworked man of talent sometimes is confronted with strange figures making strange demands upon him. Claude knew these figures now.

He had always been aware of fascination in Mrs. Shiffney. Now he let himself go toward this fascination. He had always, too, felt what he had called the minotaur-thing in her, the creature with teeth and claws fastening upon pleasure. Now he was ready to be with the minotaur-thing. For something within him, that was intimately connected with whatever he had of genius, murmured incessantly, "To-morrow I die!" And he wanted, at any cost, to dull the sound of that voice. Why should not he let his monster fasten on pleasure too? The situation was full of a piquancy which delighted Mrs. Shiffney. She was "on the other side," and was now pre-

paring to make love in the enemy's camp. Nothing pleased her more than to mingle art with love, linking the intelligence of her brain with the emotion, such as it was, of her thoroughly pagan heart. And the feeling that she was a sort of traitress to her beloved Jacques and Henriette was quite enchanting. One thing more gave a very feminine zest to her pursuit—the thought of Charmian, who knew nothing about it, but who, no doubt, would know some day. She rejoiced in intrigue, loved a secret that would eventually be hinted at, if not actually told, and revelled in proving her power on a man who, in his unknown days, had resisted it, and who now that he was on the eve, perhaps, of a wide fame, seemed ready to succumb to it. There were even moments when she found herself wishing for the success of Claude's opera, despite her active dislike of Charmian. It would really be such fun to take Claude away from that silly Charmian creature in the very hour of a triumph. Yet she did not wish to see Charmian even the neglected wife of a great celebrity. Her feelings were rather complex. But she had always been at home with complexity.

She managed to get rid of Susan Fleet, by persuading her to visit some friends of Susan who lived in Washington. Then it was easy enough to see Claude quietly, in her apartment at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and elsewhere. Mrs. Shiffney was a past mistress of what she called "playing about." Claude recognized this, and had a glimpse into a life strangely different from his own, an almost intimate glimpse which both interested and disgusted him.

In his determination to grasp at the blatant thing, the big success, a determination that pushed him almost inevitably into a certain extravagance of conduct, because it was foreign to his innermost nature, Claude gave himself to the vulgar vanity of the male. He was out here to conquer. Why not conquer Mrs. Shiffney? To do that would be scarcely more spurious than to win with a "made over" opera.

He kept secret assignations, which were not openly supposed to be secret by either Mrs. Shiffney or himself. For Mrs. Shiffney was leading him gently, savoring nuances, while he was feeling blatant, though saved by his breeding from

showing it. They had some charming, some almost exciting talks, full of innuendo, of veiled allusions to personal feeling and the human depths. And all this was mingled with art and the great life of human ambition. Mrs. Shiffney's attraction to artists was a genuine thing in her. She really felt the pull of that which was secretly powerful in Claude. And she, not too consciously, made him know this. The knowledge drew him toward her.

One day Claude went to see her after a long rehearsal. When he reached the hotel it was nearly eight o'clock. The rehearsal of his opera had only been stopped because it had been necessary to get ready for the evening performance. Claude had promised to dine with Van Brinen that night, and Charmian was dining with some friends. But, at the last moment, Van Brinen had telephoned to say that he was obliged to go to a concert on behalf of his paper. Claude had left the opera house, weary, excited, doubtful what to do. If he returned to the St. Regis he would be all alone. At that moment he dreaded solitude. After hesitating for a moment outside the stage door, he called a taxi-cab, and ordered the man to drive to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Mrs. Shiffney would probably be out, would almost certainly have some engagement for the evening. The hour was unorthodox for a visit. Claude did not care. He had been drowned in his own music for hours. He was in a strongly emotional condition, and wanted to do something strange, something bizarre.

He sent up his name to Mrs. Shiffney, who was at home. In a few moments she sent down to say she would see him in her sitting-room. When Claude came into it he found her there in an evening gown.

"Do forgive me! You're going out?" he said.

"Where are you dining?" she answered.

Claude made a vague gesture.

"Have you come to dine with me?" she said, smiling.

"But I see you are going out!"

She shook her powerful head.

"We will dine up here. But I must telephone to a number in Fifth Avenue."

She went toward the telephone.

"Oh, but I can't keep you at home. It is too outrageous!" he said.

"Give me time to telephone!" she answered, looking round at him over her shoulder.

"You are much too kind!" he said. "I—I looked in to settle about your coming to that rehearsal."

She got on to the number in Fifth Avenue and spoke through the telephone softly.

"There! That's done! And now help me to order a dinner for—" she glanced at him shrewdly—"a tired genius."

Claude smiled. They consulted together, amicably arranging the menu.

The dinner was brought quickly, and they sat down, one on each side of a round table decorated with lilies of the valley.

"I'm playing traitress to-night," Mrs. Shiffney said in her deep voice. "I was to have been at a dinner arranged for the Senniers by Mrs. Algernon Batsford."

"I am so ashamed."

"Or are you a little bit flattered?"

"Both, perhaps."

"A divinely complex condition. Tell me about the rehearsal."

They plunged into a discussion on music. Mrs. Shiffney was a past mistress in the art of subtle flattery, when she chose to be. And she always chose to be, in the service of her caprices. She understood well the vanity of the artistic temperament. She even understood its reverse side, which was strongly developed in Claude. Her efforts were dedicated to the dual temperament, and beautifully. The discussion was long and animated, lasting all through dinner to the time of Turkish coffee. Claude forgot his fatigue, and Mrs. Shiffney almost forgot her caprice. She became genuinely interested in the discussion merely as a discussion. Her sincere passion for art got the upper hand in her. And this made her the more delightful. The evening fled and its feet were winged.

"I was going to a party at Eve Inness's," she said, when half-past ten chimed in the clock on her writing-table. "But I'll give it up."

Claude sprang to his feet.

"Really you must not. I must go. I must really. I know I need any amount of sleep to make up arrears."

"You don't look sleepy."

"How could I, in New York?"

"We don't need to sleep here. Sit down again. Eve Inness is quite definitely given up."

"But—"

Mrs. Shiffney looked at him, and he sat down. At that moment he remembered the morning in the pine wood at Constantine, and how she had looked at him then. He remembered, too, and clearly, his own recoil. Now he believed that she had been very treacherous in regard to him. Yet he felt happier with her, and even at this moment as he returned her look he thought, "Whatever she may have felt at Constantine, I believe I have won her over to my side now. I have power. She always felt it. She feels it now more than ever." And abruptly he said:

"You are on Sennier's side. And really it is a sort of battle here. The two managements have turned it into a battle. We've been talking all this evening of music. Do you really wish me to succeed? I think—" he paused. He was on the edge of accusing her of treachery at Constantine. But he decided not to do so, and continued, "What I mean is, do you genuinely care whether I succeed or not?"

After a minute Mrs. Shiffney said:

"Perhaps I care even more than Charmian does."

Her large and intelligent eyes were still fixed upon Claude. She looked absolutely self-possessed, yet as if she were feeling something strongly, and meant him to be aware of that. And she believed that just then it depended upon Claude whether she cared for his success or desired his failure. His long resistance to her influence, followed by this partial yielding to it, had begun to irritate her capricious nature intensely. And this irritation, if prolonged, might give birth in her either to a really violent passion, of the burning straw species, for Claude, or to an active hatred of him. At this moment she knew this.

"Perhaps I care too much!" she said.

And instantly, as at Constantine, when the reality of her nature deliberately made itself apparent, with intention calling to him, Claude felt the invincible recoil within him, the backward movement of his true self. The spurious vanity of the male died within him. The feverish pleasure in proving his power died. And all that was left for the moment was the dominant sense of honor, of what he owed to Charmian. Mrs. Shiffney would have called this "the shriek of the Puritan." It was certainly the cry of the real man in Claude. And he had to heed it. But he loathed himself at this moment. And he felt that he had given Mrs. Shiffney the right to hate him for ever.

"My weakness is my curse!" he thought. "It makes me utterly contemptible. I must slay it!"

Desperation seized him. Abruptly he got up.

"You are much too kind!" he said, scarcely knowing what he was saying. "I can never be grateful enough to you. If I—if I do succeed, I shall know at any rate that one—" He met her eyes and stopped.

"Good-night!" she said. "I'm afraid I must send you away now, for I believe I will run in for a minute to Eve Inness, after all."

As Claude descended to the hall he knew that he had left an enemy behind him.

But the knowledge which really troubled him was that he deserved to have Mrs. Shiffney for an enemy.

His own self, his own manhood, whipped him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THAT night, when Claude arrived at the St. Regis, Charmian was still out. She did not return till just after midnight. When she came into the sitting-room she found Claude in an armchair near the window, which was slightly open. He had no book or paper, and seemed to be listening to something.

"Claudie! Why, what are you doing?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said.

"But the window! Aren't you catching cold?"

He shook his head.

"I believe you were listening to 'New York'!" she continued, taking off her cloak.

"I was."

She put her cloak down on the sofa.

"Listening for the verdict?" she said. "Trying to divine what it will be?"

"Something like that, perhaps."

"There is still a good deal of the child in you, Claude," she said seriously, but fondly too.

"Is there? Too much perhaps," he answered in a low voice.

"What's the matter? Are you feeling depressed?"

She sat down close to him.

"Are you doubtful, anxious to-night?"

"Well, this is rather an anxious time. The strain is strong."

"But you are strong, too!"

"I!" he exclaimed.

And there was in his voice a sound of great bitterness.

"Yes, I think you are. I know you are."

"You have very little reason for knowing such a thing," he answered, still with bitterness.

"You mean?"—she was looking at him almost furtively. "Whatever you mean," she concluded, "I can't help it! I

think you are. Or perhaps I really mean that I think you would be."

"Would be! When?"

"Oh! I don't know! In a great moment, a terrible moment perhaps!"

She dropped her eyes, and began slowly to pull off her gloves.

"Talking of the verdict," she said presently, glancing toward the still open window, "is the date of the first full rehearsal fixed?"

"Yes. We decided on it this evening at the theater."

"When is it to be?"

"Next Friday night. There's no performance that night. We begin at six. I daresay we shall get through about six the next morning."

"Friday! Have you—I mean, are you going to ask Mrs. Shiffney?"

During their long and intimate talk at dinner that evening Claude had invited Mrs. Shiffney to be present at the rehearsal, and she had accepted. Now it suddenly occurred to him that she was his enemy. Would she still come after what had occurred just before he left her?

"I have asked her!" he almost blurted out.

"Already! When?"

"I went round to the Ritz-Carlton to-night."

"Was she in?"

"Yes. But she was—but she went out afterward, to Mrs. Inness."

"Oh! And did she accept?"

"Yes."

Charmian's eyes were fixed upon Claude. He saw by their expression that she suspected something, or that she had divined a secret between him and Mrs. Shiffney. She looked suddenly alert, and her lips seemed to harden, giving her face a strained and not pleasant expression.

"How is she coming?" she asked.

"How?"

"Yes. Are you going to fetch her? Or am I to?"

"That wasn't decided. Nothing was said about that."

"She can't just walk in alone, without a card to admit her, or anything. You know what an autocrat Mr. Crayford is."

"But he knows Mrs. Shiffney. We met him first at her house in London, don't you remember?"

"You don't suppose he's going to let everyone he knows into a rehearsal, do you?"

Claude got up from his chair.

"No. But—Charmian, I can't think of all these details. I can't—I can't!"

There was a sharp edge to his voice.

"I have too much to carry in my mind just now."

"I know," she said, softening. "I didn't mean"—the alert expression, which for an instant had vanished, returned to her face—"I only wanted to know—"

"Please don't ask me any more! I asked Mrs. Shiffney to come to the rehearsal. She said she would. Then we talked of other things."

"Other things! Then you stayed some time?"

"A little while. If she really wishes to be at the rehearsal—"

"But we know she wishes it!"

"Well, then, she will suggest coming with you, or she may write to Crayford. I'm not going to do anything more about it."

His face was stern, grim.

"Now I'll shut the window," he added, "or you'll catch cold in that low dress."

He was moving to the window when she caught at his hand and detained him.

"Would you care if I did? Would you care if I were ill?"

"Of course I should."

"Would you care if I—"

She did not finish the sentence, but still held his hand closely in hers. In her hand-grasp Claude felt jealousy, warm, fiery, a thing almost strangely vital.

"Does she—is she getting to love me as I wish to be loved?"

The question flashed through his mind. At that moment he was very glad that he had never betrayed Charmian, very glad of the Puritan in him which perhaps many women would jeer at, did they know of its existence.

"Charmian," he said, "let me shut the window."

"Yes, yes; of course."

She let his hand go.

"It is better not to listen to the voices," she added. "They make one feel too much!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

NOTHING more was said by Charmian or Claude about Mrs. Shiffney and the rehearsal. Mrs. Shiffney made no sign. The rehearsals of Jacques Sennier's new opera were being pressed forward almost furiously, and no doubt she had little free time. Claude wondered very much what she would do, debated the question with himself. Surely now she would not wish to come to his rehearsal! And even if she did wish to be present, surely she would not try to come now! But women are not easily to be read. Claude was aware that he could not divine what Mrs. Shiffney would do. He thought, however, that it was unlikely she would come. He thought also that he wished her not to come.

Nevertheless, when the darkness gathered over New York on Friday evening, he found himself wishing strongly, even almost painfully, for her verdict.

Charmian was greatly excited. Claude still kept up his successful pretense of bold self-confidence. He had to strain every nerve to conceal his natural sensitiveness. But although he was racked by anxiety, and something else, he did not show it. Charmian was astonished by his apparent serenity now that the hour full of fate was approaching. She admired him more than ever. She even wondered at him, remembering moments, not far off, when he had shown a sort of furtive bitterness, or weariness, or depression, when she had partially divined a blackness of the depths. Now his self-confidence lifted her, and she told him so.

"There's an atmosphere of success round you," she said.

"Why not? We are going to reap the fruits of our labors," he replied.

"But even Alston is terribly nervous to-day."

"Is he? My hand is as steady as a rock."

He held it out, by a fierce effort kept it perfectly still for a moment, then let it drop against his side.

The bells of St. Patrick's Cathedral chimed five o'clock.

"Only an hour and we begin!" said Charmian. "Oh, Claude! This is almost worse than the performance."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Perhaps because it won't be final. And then they say at dress rehearsals things always go badly, and everyone thinks the piece, or the opera, is bound to be a failure. I feel wrinkles and gray hairs pouring over me in spite of your self-possession. I can't help it!"

She forced a laugh. She was walking about the room.

"I'm devoured by nerves, I suppose!" she exclaimed. "By the way, hasn't Mrs. Shiffney written about coming to-night?"

"No."

"You haven't seen her again?"

"Oh, no!"

"How very odd! Do you suppose she will try to get in?"

"How can I tell?"

"But isn't it strange, after her making such a fuss about coming—this silence?"

"Probably she's immersed in Sennier's opera and won't bother about mine."

"Women always bother."

There was a "b-r-r-r!" in the lobby. Charmian started violently.

"What can that be?"

Claude went to the door, and returned with Armand Gillier.

"Oh, Monsieur Gillier!"

Charmian looked at Gillier's large and excited eyes.

"You are coming with us?"

"If you allow me, madame!" said Gillier formally, bowing over her hand. "It seems to me that the collaborators should go together."

"Of course. It's still early, but we may as well start. The theater's pulling at me—pulling!"

"My wife's quite strung up!" said Claude, smiling.

"And Claude is disgustingly cool!" said Charmian.

Gillier looked hard at Claude, and Charmian thought she detected admiration in his eyes.

"Men need to be cool when the critical moment is at hand," he remarked. "I learned that long ago in Algeria."

"Then you are not nervous now?"

"Nerves are for women!" he returned.

But the expression in his face belied his words.

"Claude is cooler than he is!" Charmian thought.

She went to put on her hat and her sealskin coat. She longed, yet dreaded to start.

When they arrived at the stage-door of the Opera House the dark young man came from his office on the right with his hands full of letters, and, smiling, distributed them to Charmian, Claude and Gillier.

"It will be a go!" he said, in a clear voice. "Everyone says so. Mr. Crayford is up in his office. He wants to see Mr. Heath. There's the elevator!"

At this moment the lift appeared, sinking from the upper regions under the guidance of a smiling colored man.

"I'll come up with you, Claudie. Are you going on the stage, Monsieur Gillier?"

"No, madame, not yet. I must speak to Mademoiselle Mardon about the Ouled Naïl scene."

People were hurrying in, looking preoccupied. In a small abode on the left, a little way from the outer door, an elderly man in uniform, with a square gray beard, sat staring out through a small window, with a cautious and important air.

Charmian and Claude stepped into the lift, holding their letters. As they shot up they both glanced hastily at the addresses.

"Nothing from Adelaide Shiffney!" said Charmian. "Have you got anything?"

"No."

"Then she can't be coming."

"It seems not."

"I—then we shan't have the verdict in advance."

The lift stopped, and they got out.

"If we had it would probably have been a wrong one,"

said Claude. "The only real verdict is the one the great public gives."

"Yes, of course. But, still—"

"Hulloh, little lady! So you're sticking to the ship till she's safe in port!"

Crayford met them in the doorway of his large and elaborately furnished sanctum.

"Come right in! There's a lot to talk about. Shut the door, Harry. Now, Mulworth, let's get to business. What is it that is wrong with the music to go with the Fakir scene?"

At six o'clock the rehearsal had not begun. At six-thirty it had not begun. The orchestra was there, sunk out of sight and filling the dimness with the sounds of tuning. But the great curtain was down. And from behind it came shouting voices, noises of steps, loud and persistent hammerings.

A very few people were scattered about in the huge space which contained the stalls, some nondescript men, whispering to each other, or yawning and staring vaguely; and five or six women who looked more alert and vivacious. There was no one visible in the shrouded boxes. The lights were kept very low.

The sound of hammering continued and became louder. A sort of deadness and strange weariness seemed to brood in the air, as if the great monster were in a sinister and heavy mood, full of an almost malign lethargy. The orchestral players ceased from tuning their instruments, and talked together in their sunken habitation.

Seven o'clock struck in the clocks of New York. Just as the chimes died away, Mrs. Shiffney drew up at the stage-door in a smart white motor-car. She was accompanied by a very tall and big man, with a robust air of self-confidence, and a face that was clean-shaven and definitely American.

"I don't suppose they've begun yet," she said, as she got out and walked slowly across the pavement, warmly wrapped up in a marvellous black sable coat. "Have you got your card, Jonson?"

"Here!" said the big man in a big voice.

The dark young man came from his office. On seeing the big man he started, and looked impressed.

"Mr. Crayford here?" said the big man.

"I think he's on the stage."

"Could you be good enough to send him in my card? There's some writing on the back. And here's a note from this lady."

"Certainly, with pleasure," said the young man, with his cheerful smile. "Come right into the office, if you will!"

"Hulloh!" said Crayford, a moment later to Claude. "Here's Mrs. Shiffney wants to be let in to the rehearsal! And whom with, d'you think?"

"Whom?" asked Claude quickly. "Not Madame Sennier?"

"Jonson Ramer."

"The financier?"

"Our biggest! My boy, you're booming! Old Jonson Ramer asking to come in to our rehearsal! We'll have that all over the States to-morrow morning. Where's Cane?"

"I'll fetch him, sir!" said a thin boy standing by.

"Are you going to let them in?"

"Am I going to! Finnigan, go and take the lady and Mr. Ramer to any box they like. Ah, Cane! Here's something for you to let yourself out over!"

Mr. Cane read Ramer's card and looked radiant.

"Well, I'm—!"

"I should think you are! Go and spread it. This boy's getting compliments enough to turn him silly."

And Crayford clapped Claude almost affectionately on the shoulder.

"Now then, Mulworth!" he roared, with a complete change of manner. "When in thunder are we going to have that curtain up?"

Claude turned away. He wished to find Charmian, to tell her that Mrs. Shiffney had come and had brought Jonson Ramer with her. But he did not know where she was. As he came off the stage into the wings he met Alston Lake dressed for his part of an officer of Spahis.

"I say, Claude, have you heard?"

"What?"

"Jonson Ramer's here for the rehearsal!"

"I know. Can you tell me where Charmian is?"

"Haven't an idea! There's the prelude beginning! My! Where are my formamints?"

Charmian meanwhile had gone into the theater with a dressmaker, who had come to see the effect of Enid Mardon's costumes which she had "created." Charmian and the dressmaker, a massive and handsome woman, were sitting together in the stalls, discussing Enid Mardon's caprices.

"She tore the dress to pieces," said the dressmaker. "She made rags of it, and then pinned it together all wrong, and said to me—to *me!*—that now it began to look like an Ouled Naïl girl's costume. I told her if she liked to face Noo York—"

"H'sh–sh!" whispered Charmian. "There's the prelude beginning at last. She's not going to—?"

"No. Of course she had to come back to my original idea!"

And the dressmaker pressed a large handkerchief against her handsome nose, savored the last new perfume, and leaned back in her stall magisterially with a faint smile.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Shiffney came into a box at the back of the stalls followed by Jonson Ramer. Without taking off her sable coat she sat down in a corner and looked quickly over the obscure space before her. Immediately she saw Charmian and the dressmaker, who sat within a few yards of her. Claude was not visible. Mrs. Shiffney sat back a little farther in the box, and whispered to Mr. Ramer.

"Are you really going to join the Directorate of the Metropolitan?" she said.

"I may, when this season's over."

"Does Crayford know it?"

Mr. Ramer shook his massive and important head.

"I'm not certain of it myself," he observed, with a smile.

"And if you do join?"

"If I decide to join"—he glanced round the enormous empty house. "I think I should buy Crayford out of here."

"Would he go?"

"I think he might—for a price."

"If this new man turns out to be worth while, I suppose

you would take him over as one of the—what are they called—one of the assets?"

"Ha!" He leaned toward her, and just touched her arm with one of his powerful hands. "You must tell me to-night whether he is going to be worth while."

"Won't you know?"

"I might when I got him before a New York audience. But you are more likely to know to-night."

"I have got rather a flair, I believe. Now—I'll taste the new work."

She did not speak again, but gave herself up to attention, though her mind was often with the woman in the sealskin coat who sat so near to her. Had Claude said anything to that woman? There was very little to say. But—had he said it? She wondered on what terms Charmian and Claude were, whether the Puritan had ever found any passion for the Charmian-creature. Claude's music broke in upon her questionings.

Mrs. Shiffney had a retentive as well as a swift mind, and she remembered every detail of Gillier's powerful, almost brutal libretto. In the reading it had transported her into a wild life, in a land where there is still romance, still strangeness—a land upon which civilization has not yet fastened its padded claw. And she had imagined the impression which this glimpse of an ardent and bold life might produce upon highly civilized people, like herself, if it were helped by powerful music.

Now she listened, waited, remembering her visits to Mullion House, the night in the café by the city wall when Said Hitani and his Arabs played, the hour of sun in the pine wood above the great ravine, other hours in New York. There was something in Heath that she had wanted, that she wanted still, though part of her sneered at him, laughed at him, had a worldly contempt for him, though another part of her almost hated him. She desired a fiasco for him. Nevertheless the art feeling within her, and the greedy emotional side of her, demanded the success of his effort just now, because she was listening, because she hated to be bored, because the libretto was fine. The artistic side of her nature was in strong conflict

with the capricious and sensual side that evening. But she looked—for Jonson Ramer—coolly self-possessed and discriminating as she sat very still in the shadow.

"That's a fine voice!" murmured Ramer presently.

Alston Lake was singing.

"Yes. I've heard him in London. But he seems to have come on wonderfully."

"It's an operatic voice."

When Alston Lake went off the stage Ramer remarked:

"That's a fellow to watch."

"Crayford's very clever at discovering singers."

"Almost too clever for the Metropolitan, eh?"

"Enid Mardon looks wonderful."

Silence fell upon them again.

The dressmaker had got up from her seat and slipped away into the darkness, after examining Enid Mardon's costume for two or three minutes through a small but powerful opera-glass. Charmian was now quite alone.

While the massive woman was with her Charmian had been unconscious of any agitating, or disturbing, influence in her neighborhood. The dressmaker had probably a strong personality. Very soon after she had gone Charmian began to feel curiously uneasy, despite her intense interest in the music, and in all that was happening on the stage. She glanced along the stalls. No one was sitting in a line with her. In front of her she saw only the few people who had already taken their places when the curtain went up. She gave her attention again to the stage, but only with a strong effort. And very soon she was again compelled by this strange uneasiness to look about the theater. Now she felt certain that somebody whom she had not yet seen, but who was near to her, was disturbing her. And she thought, "Claude must have come in!" On this thought she turned round rather sharply, and looked behind her at the boxes. She did not actually see anyone. But it seemed to her that, as she turned and looked, something moved back in a box very near to her, on her left. And immediately she felt certain that that box was occupied.

"Adelaide Shiffney's there!"

Suddenly that certainty took possession of her. And Claude? Where was he?

Hitherto she had supposed that Claude was behind the scenes, or perhaps in the orchestra sitting near the conductor, Meroni; but now jealousy sprang up in her. If Claude were with Adelaide Shiffney in that box while she sat alone! If Claude had really known all the time that Adelaide Shiffney was coming and had not told her, Charmian! Unreason, which is the offspring of jealousy, filled her mind. She burned with anger.

"I know he is in that box with her!" she thought. "And he did not tell me she was coming because he wanted to be with her at the rehearsal and not with me."

And suddenly her intense, her painful interest in the opera faded away out of her. She was concentrated upon the purely human things. Her imagination of a possibility, which her jealousy already proclaimed a certainty, blotted out even the opera. Woman, man—the intentness of the heart came upon her, like a wave creeping all over her, blotting out landmarks.

The curtain fell on the first act. It had gone well, unexpectedly well. Behind the scenes there were congratulations. Crayford was radiant. Mr. Mulworth wiped his brow fanatically, but looked almost human as he spoke in a hoarse remnant of voice to a master carpenter. Enid Mardon went off the stage with the massive dressmaker in almost amicable conversation. Meroni, the Milanese conductor, mounted up from his place in the subterranean regions, smiling brilliantly and twisting his black moustaches. Alston Lake had got rid of his nervousness. He knew he had done well and was more "mad" about the opera than ever.

"It's the bulliest thing there's been in New York in years!" he exclamied, as he went to his dressing-room, where he found Claude, who had been sitting in the orchestra, and who had now hurried round to ask the singers how they felt in their parts. Gillier was with Miss Mardon, at whose feet he was laying his homage.

Meanwhile Charmian was still quite alone.

She sat for a moment after the curtain fell.

"Surely Claude will come now!" she said to herself. "In decency he must come!"

But no one came, and anger, the sense of desertion, grew in her till she was unable to sit still any longer. She got up, turned, and again looked toward the box in which she had fancied that she saw something move. Now she saw a woman's arm and hand, a bit of a woman's shoulder. Somebody, a woman, wearing sables, was in the box turning round, evidently in conversation with another person who was hidden.

Adelaide Shiffney owned wonderful sables.

Without further hesitation Charmian, driven, made her way to the exit from the stalls on her right, went out and found herself in the blackness of the huge corridor running behind the ground-tier boxes. Before leaving the stalls she had tried to locate the box, and thought that she had located it. She meant to go into it without knocking, as one who supposed it to be empty. Now, with a feverish hand she felt for a door-handle. She found one, turned it, and went into an empty box. Standing still in it, she listened and heard a woman's voice that she knew say:

"I dare say. But I don't mean to say anything yet. I have my reputation to take care of, you must remember."

The words ended in a little laugh.

"It is Adelaide. She's in the next box!" said Charmian to herself.

For a moment a horrible idea suggested itself to her. She thought of sitting down very softly and of eavesdropping. But the better part of her at once rebelled against this idea, and without hesitation she slipped out of the box. She stood still in the corridor for three or four minutes. The fact that she had seriously thought of eavesdropping almost frightened her, and she was trying to come to the resolve to abandon her project of interrupting Mrs. Shiffney's conversation with the hidden person who, she felt sure, must be Claude. Presently she walked away a few steps, going toward the entrance. Then she stopped again.

"I have my reputation to take care of, you must remember."

Adelaide Shiffney's words kept passing through her mind.

What had Claude said to evoke such words? In the darkness, Charmian, with a strong and excited imagination, conceived Claude faithless to her. She did more. She conceived of triumph and faithlessness coming together into her life, of Claude as a famous man and another woman's lover. "Would you rather he remained obscure and entirely yours?" a voice seemed to say within her. She did not debate this question, but again turned, made her way to Mrs. Shiffney's box, which she located rightly this time, pushed the door and abruptly went into it.

"Hulloh!" said a powerful and rather surprised voice.

In the semi-obscurity Charmian saw a very big man, whom she had never seen before, getting up from a chair.

"I beg your pardon," she exclaimed, startled. "I didn't know—"

"Charmian! Is it you?"

Adelaide Shiffney's voice came from beyond the big man.

"Adelaide! You've come to our rehearsal!"

"Yes. Let me introduce Mr. Jonson Ramer to you. This is Mrs. Heath, Jonson, the genius's good angel. Sit down with us for a minute, Charmian."

Adelaide Shiffney's deep voice was almost suspiciously cordial. But Charmian's sense of relief was so great that she accepted the invitation, and sat down feeling strangely happy.

But almost instantly with the laying to rest of one anxiety came the birth of another.

"Well, what do you think of the opera?" she asked, trying to speak carelessly.

Jonson Ramer leaned toward her. He thought she looked pretty, and he liked pretty women even more than most men do.

"Very original!" he said. "Opens powerfully. But I don't think we can judge of it yet. It's going remarkably well."

"Wonderfully!" said Mrs. Shiffney.

Charmian turned quickly toward her. It was Adelaide's verdict that she wanted, not Jonson Ramer's.

"Enid Mardon's perfect," continued Mrs. Shiffney. "She

will make a sensation. And the *mise-en-scène* is really exquisite, not overloaded. Crayford has evidently learnt something from Berlin."

"How malicious Adelaide is!" thought Charmian. "She won't speak of the music simply because she knows I only care about that."

She talked for a little while, sufficiently mistress of herself to charm Jonson Ramer. Then she got up.

"I must run away. I have so many people to see and encourage."

Her gay voice indicated that she needed no encouragement, that she was quite sure of success.

"We shall see you at the end?" said Mrs. Shiffney.

"But will you stay? It may be six o'clock in the morning," said Charmian.

"That is a little late. But—"

At this moment Charmian saw Claude coming into the stalls by the left entrance near the stage.

"Oh, there's Claude!" she exclaimed, interrupting Mrs. Shiffney, and evidently not knowing that she did so. "Au revoir! Thank you so much!"

She was gone.

"Thank me so much!" said Mrs. Shiffney to Jonson Ramer. "What for? Do you know, Jonson?"

"Seems to me that little woman's unfashionable—mad about her own husband!" said Jonson Ramer.

The curtain went up on the second act.

Claude had sat down in the stalls. In a moment Charmian slipped into a seat at his side and touched his hand.

"Claude, where have you been?"

Her long fingers closed on his hand.

"Charmian!"

He looked excited and startled. He stared at her.

"What's the matter?"

His face changed.

"Nothing. It's all going well so far."

"Perfectly. Adelaide Shiffney's here."

"I know."

Charmian's fingers unclasped.

"You've seen her?"

"No, but I heard she was here with Jonson Ramer."

"Yes. I've—"

They fell into silence, concentrated upon the stage. In a few minutes they were joined by Gillier, who sat down just behind them. With his coming their attention was intensified. They listened jealously, attended as it were with every fiber of their bodies, as well as with their minds, to everything that was happening in this man-created world.

Charmian felt Gillier listening, felt, far away behind him, Adelaide Shiffney listening. Gradually her excitement and anxiety became painful. Her mind seemed to her to be burning, not smouldering but flaming. She clasped the two arms of her stall.

Something went wrong on the stage, and the opera was stopped. The orchestra died away in a sort of wailing confusion, which ceased on the watery sound of a horn. Enid Mardon began speaking with concentrated determination. Crayford and Mr. Mulworth came upon the stage.

"Where's Mr. Heath? Where's Mr. Heath?" shouted Crayford.

Claude, who was already standing up, hurried away toward the entrance and disappeared. Charmian sat biting her lips and tingling all over in an acute exasperation of the nerves. Behind her Armand Gillier sat in silence. Claude joined the people on the stage, and there was a long colloquy in which eventually Meroni, the conductor, took part. Charmian presently heard Gillier moving restlessly behind her. Then she heard a snap of metal and knew that he had just looked at his watch. What was Adelaide doing? What was she thinking? What did she think of this breakdown? Everything had been going so well. But now no doubt things would go badly.

"Will they ever start again?" Charmian asked herself. "What can they be talking about? What can Miss Mardon mean by those frantic gesticulations, now by turning her back on Mr. Crayford and Claude? If only people—"

Meroni left the stage. In a moment the orchestra sounded once more. Charmian turned round instinctively for sympathy

to Armand Gillier, and caught an unpleasnat look in his large eyes. Instantly she was on the defensive.

"It's going marvellously for a first full rehearsal," she said to him. "Claude expected we should be here for nine or ten hours at the very least."

"Possibly, madame!" he replied.

He gnawed his moustache. His head, drenched as usual with eau-de-quinine, looked hard as a bullet. Charmian wondered what thoughts, what expectations it contained. But she turned again to the stage without saying anything more. At that moment she hated Gillier for not helping her to be sanguine. She said to herself that he had been always against both her and Claude. Of course he would be cruelly, ferociously critical of Claude's music, because he was so infatuated with his own libretto. Angrily she dubbed him a poor victim of megalomania.

Claude slipped into the seat at her side, and suddenly she felt comforted, protected. But these alternations of hope and fear tried her nerves. She began to be conscious of that, to feel the intensity of the strain she was undergoing. Was not the strain upon Claude's nerves much greater? She stole a glance at his dark face, but could not tell.

The second act came to an end without another breakdown, but Charmian felt more doubtful about the opera than she had felt after the first act. The deadness of rehearsal began to creep upon her, almost like moss creeping over a building. Claude hurried away again. And Mrs. Haynes, the dressmaker, took his place and began telling Charmian a long story about Enid Mardon's impossible proceedings. It seemed that she had picked, or torn, to pieces another dress. Charmian listened, tried to listen, failed really to listen. She seemed to smell the theater. She felt both dull and excited.

"I said to her, 'Madame, it is only monkeys who pick everything to pieces.' I felt it was time that I spoke out strongly."

Mrs. Haynes continued inexorably. In the well of the orchestra a hidden flute suddenly ran up a scale ending on E flat. Charmian almost began to writhe with secret irritation.

"What a long wait!" she exclaimed, ruthlessly inter-

rupting her companion. "I really must go behind and see what is happening."

"But they must have a quarter of an hour to change the set," said the dressmaker. "And it's only five minutes since—"

"Yes, I know. I'll look for you here when the curtain goes up."

As she made her way toward the exit she turned and looked toward the boxes. She did not see the distant figures of Mrs. Shiffney and the financier. And she stopped abruptly. Could they have gone away already? She looked at her watch. It was only ten o'clock. Her eyes travelled swiftly round the semicircle of boxes. She saw no one. They must have gone. Her heart sank, but her cheeks burned with an angry flush. At that moment she felt almost like a mother who hears people call her child ugly. She stood for a moment, thinking. The verdict in advance! If Mrs. Shiffney had gone away it was surely given already. Charmian resolved that she would say nothing to Claude. To do so might discourage him. Her cheeks were still burning when she pushed the heavy door which protected the mysterious region from the banality she had left.

But there she was again carried from mood to mood.

She found everyone enthusiastic. Crayford's tic was almost triumphant. His little beard bristled with an aggressive optimism.

"Where's Claude?" said Charmian, not seeing him and thinking of Mrs. Shiffney.

"Making some cuts," said Crayford. "The stage shows things up. There are bits in that act that have got to come out. But it's a bully act and will go down as easily as a—Hullo, Jimber! Sure you've got your motors right for the locust scene?"

He escaped.

"Mr. Mulworth!" cried Charmian, seeing the producer rushing toward the wings, with the perspiration pouring over his now haggard features. "*Mister* Mulworth! How long will Claude take making the cuts, do you think?"

"He'll have to stick at them all through the next act. If

they're not made the act's a fizzle! Jeremy! See here! We've got to have a pin-light on Miss Mardon when she comes down that staircase!"

He escaped.

"Signor Meroni, I hear you have to make some cuts! D'you think—"

"*Signora—ma sì! Ma sì!*"

He escaped.

"Take care, marm, if you please! Look out for that sand bank!"

Charmian withdrew from the frantic turmoil of work, and fled to visit the singers, and drink in more comfort. The only person who dashed her hopes was Miss Enid Mardon, who was a great artist but by nature a pessimist, ultra critical, full of satire and alarmingly outspoken.

"I tell you honestly," she said, looking at Charmian with fatalistic eyes, "I don't believe in it. But I'll do my best."

"But I thought you were delighted with the first act. Surely Monsieur Gillier told me—"

"Oh, I only spoke to him about the libretto. That's a masterpiece. Did you ever see such a dress as that elephant Haynes expects me to wear for the third act?"

"Really Miss Mardon's impossible!" Charmian was saying a moment later to Alston Lake.

"Why, Mrs. Charmian?"

"Oh, I don't know! She always looks on the dark side."

"With eyes like hers what else can she do? Isn't it going stunningly?"

"Alston, I must tell you—you're an absolute darling!"

She nearly kissed him. A bell sounded.

"Third act!" exclaimed Alston, in his resounding baritone.

Charmian escaped, feeling much more hopeful, indeed almost elated. Alston was right. With eyes like hers how could Enid Mardon anticipate good things?

Nevertheless Charmian remembered that she had called the libretto a masterpiece.

Oh! the agony of these swiftly changing moods! She felt as if she were being tossed from one to another by some cruel

giant. She tried to look forward. She said to herself, "Very soon we shall know! All this will be at an end."

But when the third act was finished she felt as if never could there be an end to her acute nervous anxiety. For the third act did not go well. The locusts were all wrong. The lighting did not do. Most of the "effects" missed fire. There were stoppages, there were arguments, there was a row between Miss Mardon and Signor Meroni. Passages were re-tried, chaos seemed to descend upon the stage, engulfing the opera and all who had anything to do with it. Charmian grew cold with despair.

"Thank God Adelaide did go away!" she said to herself at half-past one in the morning.

She turned her head and saw Mrs. Shiffney and Jonson Ramer sitting in the stalls not far from her. Mrs. Shiffney made a friendly gesture, lifting up her right hand. Charmian returned it, and set her teeth.

"What does it matter? I don't care!"

The act ended as it had begun in chaos. In the finale something went all wrong in the orchestra, and the whole thing had to be stopped. Miss Mardon was furious. There was an altercation.

"This," said Charmian to herself, "is my idea of Hell."

She felt that she was being punished for every sin, however tiny, that she had ever committed. She longed to creep away and hide. She thought of all she had done to bring about the opera, of the flight from England, of the life at Djenan-el-Maqui, of the grand hopes that had lived in the little white house above the sea.

"Start it again, I tell you!" roared Crayford. "We can't stand here all night to hear you talking!"

"Yes," a voice within Charmian said, "this is Hell!"

She bent her head. She felt like one sinking down.

When the act was over she went out at once. She was afraid of Mrs. Shiffney.

The smiling colored man took her up in the elevator to a room where she found Claude in his shirt sleeves, with a cup of black coffee beside him, working at the score. He looked up.

"Charmian! I've just finished all I can do to-night. What's the time?"

"Nearly two."

"Did the third act go well?"

She looked at his white face and burning eyes.

"Yes," she said.

"Sit down. You look tired."

He went on working.

Just as two o'clock struck he finished, and got up from the table over which he had been leaning for hours.

"Come along! Let's go down. Oh!"

He stopped, and drank the black coffee.

"By the way," he said, "won't you have some?"

"Yes," she said eagerly.

He rang and ordered some for her. While they were waiting for it she said:

"What an experience this is!"

"Yes."

"How quietly you take it!"

"We're in for it. It would be no use to lose one's head."

"No, of course! But—oh, what a fight it is. I can scarcely believe that in a few days it must be over, that we shall *know!*"

"Here's the coffee. Drink it up."

She drank it. They went down in the lift. As they parted—for Claude had to go to Meroni—Charmian said:

"Adelaide Shiffney's still here."

"If she stays to the end we must find out what she thinks."

"Or—shall we leave it? After all—"

"No, no! I wish to hear her opinion."

There was a hard dry sound in his voice.

"Very well."

Claude disappeared.

The black coffee which Charmian had drunk excited her. But it helped her. As she went back into the theater for the fourth and last act she felt suddenly stronger, more hopeful. She was able to say to herself, "This is only a rehearsal. Rehearsals always go badly. If they don't actors and singers think it a bad sign. Of course the opera cannot sound really

well when they keep stopping." Another thing helped her now. She was joined by Alston Lake who was not on in the last act. He took her to a box and they ensconced themselves in it together. Then he produced from the capacious pockets of his overcoat a box of delicious sandwiches and a small bottle of white wine. The curtain was still down. They had time for a gay little supper.

How Charmian enjoyed it and Alston's optimism! The world changed. She saw everything in another light. She ate, drank, talked, laughed. Mrs. Shiffney and Ramer had vanished from the stalls, but Alston said they were still in the theater. They were having supper, too, in one of the lobbies. Crayford had just gone to see them.

"And is he satisfied?"

"Oh, yes. He says it's coming out all right."

"But it can't be ready by the date he's fixed for the first night!"

"Yes, it can. It's got to be."

"Well, I don't see how it can be."

"It will be. Crayford has said so. And that settles it."

"What an extraordinary man he is!"

"He's a great man!"

"Alston!"

"Yes, Mrs. Charmian?"

"He wouldn't make a great mistake, would he?"

"A mistake!"

"I mean a huge mistake."

"Not he! There goes the curtain at last."

"And there's Adelaide Shiffney coming in again. She is going to stay to the end. If only this act goes well!"

She shut her eyes for a minute and found herself praying. The coffee, the little supper had revived her. She felt renewed. All fatigue had left her. She was alert, intent, excited, far more self-possessed than she had been at any other period of the night. And she felt strongly responsive. The power of Gillier's libretto culminated in the last act, which was short, fierce, concentrated, and highly dramatic. In it Enid Mardon had a big acting chance. She and Gillier had become great allies, on account of her admiration of his libretto.

Gillier, who had been with her many times during the night, now slipped into the front row of the stalls to watch his divinity.

"There's Gillier!" whispered Charmian. "He's mad about Miss Mardon."

"She's a great artist."

"I know. But, oh, how I hate her!"

"Why?"

But Charmian would not tell him. And now they gave themselves to the last act.

It went splendidly, without a hitch. After the misery of the third act this successful conclusion was the more surprising. It swept away all Charmian's doubts. She frankly exulted. It even seemed to her that never at any time had she felt any doubts about the fate of the opera. From the first its triumph had been a foregone conclusion. From the abysses she floated up to the peaks and far above them.

"Oh, Alston, it's too wonderful!" she exclaimed. "If only there were someone to applaud!"

"There'll be a crowd in a few days."

"How glorious! How I long to see them, the dear thousands shouting for Claude. I must go to Adelaide Shiffney. I must catch her before she goes. There can't be two opinions. An act like that is irresistible. Oh!"

She almost rushed out of the box.

In the stalls she came upon Mrs. Shiffney and Jonson Ramer who were standing up ready to go. A noise of departure came up from the hidden orchestra. Voices were shouting behind the scenes. In a moment the atmosphere of the vast theater seemed to have entirely changed. Night and the deadness of slumber seemed falling softly, yet heavily, about it. The musicians were putting their instruments into cases and bags. A black cat stole furtively unseen along a row of stalls, heading away from Charmian.

"So you actually stayed to the end!" Charmian said.

Her eyes were fastened on Mrs. Shiffney.

"Oh, yes. We couldn't tear ourselves away, could we, Mr. Ramer?"

"No, indeed!"

"The last act is the best of all," Mrs. Shiffney said.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Charmian.

There was a slight pause. Then Ramer said:

"I must really congratulate you, Mrs. Heath. I don't know your husband unfortunately, but—"

"Here he is!" said Charmian.

At this moment Claude came toward them, holding himself, she thought, unusually upright, almost like a man who has been put through too much drill. With a determined manner, and smiling, he came up to them.

"I feel almost ashamed to have kept you here to this hour," he said to Mrs. Shiffney. "But really for a rehearsal it didn't go so badly, did it?"

"Wonderfully well we thought. Mr. Ramer wants to congratulate you."

She introduced the two men to one another.

"Yes, indeed!" said Ramer. "It's a most interesting work—most interesting." He laid a heavy emphasis on the repeated words, and glanced sideways at Mrs. Shiffney, whose lips were fixed in a smile. "And how admirably put on!"

He ran on for several minutes with great self-possession.

"Miss Mardon is quite wonderful!" said Mrs. Shiffney, when he stopped.

And she talked rapidly for some minutes, touching on various points in the opera with a great deal of deftness.

"As to Alston Lake, he quite astonished us!" she said presently. "He is going to be a huge success."

She discussed the singers, showing her usual half-slipshod discrimination, dropping here and there criticisms full of acuteness.

"Altogether," she concluded, "it has been a most interesting and unusual evening. Ah, there is Monsieur Gillier!"

Gillier came up and received congratulations. His expression was very strange. It seemed to combine something that was morose with a sort of exultation. Once he shot a half savage glance at Claude. He raved about Enid Mardon.

"We are going round to see her!" Mrs. Shiffney said. "Come, Mr. Ramer!"

Quickly she wished Charmian and Claude good-night.

"All my congratulations!" she said. "And a thousand wishes for a triumph on the first night. By the way, will it really be on the twenty-eighth, do you think?"

"I believe so," said Claude.

"Can it be ready?"

"We mean to try."

"Ah, you are workers! And Mr. Crayford's a wonder. Good-night, dear Charmian! What a night for you!"

She buttoned her sable coat at the neck and went away with Ramer and Armand Gillier.

As she turned to the right in the corridor she murmured to Gillier:

"Why didn't you give it to Jacques? Oh, the pity of it!"

Claude and Charmian said scarcely anything as they drove to their hotel. Charmian lay back in the taxi-cab with shut eyes, her temples throbbing. But when they were in their sitting-room she came close to her husband, and said:

"Claude, I want to ask you something."

"What is it?"

"Have you had a quarrel with Adelaide Shiffney?"

Claude hesitated.

"A quarrel?"

"Yes. Have you given her any reason—just lately—to dislike you personally, to hate you perhaps?"

"What should make you think so?"

"Please answer me!" Her voice had grown sharp.

"Perhaps I have. But please don't ask me anything more, Charmian. If you do, I cannot answer you."

"Now I understand!" she exclaimed, almost passionately.

"What?"

"Why she turned down her thumb at the opera."

"But—"

"Claude, she did, she did! You know she did! There was not one real word for you from either her or Mr. Ramer, not one! We've had her verdict. But what is it worth? Nothing! Less than nothing! You've told me why. All her cleverness, all her discrimination has failed her, just because—oh, we women are contemptible sometimes! It's

no use our pretending we aren't. Claude, I'm glad—I'm thankful you've made her hate you. And I know how!"

"Hush! Don't let us talk about it."

"Poor Adelaide! How mad she will be on the twenty-eighth when she hears how the public take it!"

Claude only said:

"If we are ready."

CHAPTER XXXV

JACOB CRAYFORD was not the man to be beaten when he had set his heart on, put his hand to, any enterprise. On the day he had fixed upon for the production of Claude's opera the opera was ready to be produced. At the cost of heroic exertions the rough places had been made plain, every stage "effect" had been put right, all the "cuts" declared by Crayford to be essential had been made by Claude, the orchestra had mastered its work, the singers were "at home" in their parts. How it had all been accomplished in the short time Charmian did not understand. It seemed to her almost as if she had assisted at the accomplishment of the incredible, as if she had seen a miracle happen. She was obliged to believe in it after the final rehearsal, which was, so Crayford, Mr. Mulworth, Meroni, and it was even rumored Jimber declared, the most perfect rehearsal they had ever been present at.

"Exactly three hours and a half!" Crayford had remarked when the curtain came down on the fourth act. "So we come ahead of the Metropolitan. I've just heard they've had a set back with Sennier's opera; can't produce for nearly a week after the date they'd settled. We needn't have been in such a devil of a hurry after all. But we've got the laugh on them now. Sennier's first opera was a white man. No doubt about that. But the hoodoo seems out against this one. I tell you"—he had swung round to Claude, who had just come upon the stage—"I'd rather have this opera of yours than Sennier's, although he's known all over creation and you're nothing but a boom-boy up to now. I used to believe in names, but upon my word seems to me the public's changing. Give 'em the goods and they don't care where they come from."

His eyes twinkled as he added, clapping Claude on the shoulder:

"All very well for you now, my boy! But you'll wish it was the other way, p'raps, when you come round to the stage door with your next opera on offer!"

He was in grand spirits. He had "licked" the Metropolitan to a "frazzle" over the date of production, and he was going to "lick them to a frazzle" with the production. Every reserved seat in the house was sold for Claude's first night. Crayford stepped on air.

In the afternoon of the day of production, when Charmian and Claude, shut up in their apartment at the St. Regis, and denied to all visitors, were trying to rest, and were pretending to be quite calm, a note was brought in from Mrs. Shiffney. It was addressed to Charmian, and contained a folded slip of green paper, which fell to the ground as she opened the note. Claude picked it up.

"What is it?" said Charmian.

"A box ticket for the Metropolitan. It must be for Sennier's first night, I suppose."

"It is!" said Charmian, who had looked at the note.

In a moment she gave it to Claude without comment.

RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL.
Feb. 28th

"DEAR CHARMIAN,—Only a word to wish you and your genius a gigantic success to-night. We've all been praying for it. Even Susan has condescended from the universal to the particular on this occasion, because she's so devoted to both of you. We are all coming, of course, Box Number Fifteen, and are going to wear our best Sunday tiaras in honor of the occasion. I hear you are to have a marvellous audience, all the millionaires, as well as your humble friends, the Adelaides and the Susans and the Henriette Senniers. Mr. Crayford is a magnificent drum-beater, but after to-night your genius won't need him, I hope and believe. I enclose a box for Jacques Sennier's first night, which, as you'll see by the date, has had to be postponed for four days—something wrong with the scenery. No hitch in your case! I feel you are on the edge of a triumph.

"Hopes and prayers for the genius.—Yours ever sincerely,
"ADELAIDE SHIFFNEY."

"Susan sends her love—not the universal brand."

Claude read the note, and kept it for a moment in his hand. He was looking at it, but he knew Charmian's eyes were on him, he knew she was silently asking him to tell her all that had happened between Mrs. Shiffney and him. And he realized that her curiosity was the offspring of a jealousy which she probably wished to conceal, but which she suffered under even on such a day of anxiety and anticipation as this.

"Very kind of her!" he said at last, giving back the note with the box ticket carefully folded between the leaves. "Of course we will go to hear Sennier's opera. He is coming to ours."

"To yours!"

"Ours!" Claude repeated, with emphasis.

Charmian looked down. Then she went to the writing-table and put Mrs. Shiffney's note into one of its little drawers. She pushed the drawer softly. It clicked as it shut. She sighed. Something in the note they had just read made her feel apprehensive. It was almost as if it had given out a subtle exhalation which had affected her physically.

"Claudie!" she said, turning round. "I would give almost anything to be like Susan to-day."

"Would you? But why?"

"She would be able to take it all calmly. She would be able to say to herself—'all this is passing, a moment in eternity, whichever way things go my soul will remain unaffected'—something like that. And it would really be so with Susan."

"She certainly carries with her a great calmness."

Charmian gazed at him.

"You are wonderful to-day, too."

Claude had kept up to this moment his dominating, almost bold air of a conqueror of circumstances, the armor which he had put on as a dress suitable to New York.

"But in quite a different way," she added. "Susan never defies."

Claude was startled by her shrewdness but avoided comment on it.

"Madre must be thinking of us to-day," he said.

"Yes. I thought—I almost expected she would send us a cablegram."

"It may come yet. There's plenty of time."

Charmian looked at the clock.

"Only four hours before the curtain goes up."

"Or we may find one for us at the theater."

"Somehow I don't think Madre would send it there."

She went to sit down on the sofa, putting cushions behind her with nervous hands, leaned back, leaned forward, moved the cushions, again leaned back.

"I almost wish we'd asked Alston to come in to-day," she said.

"But he's resting."

"I know. But he would have come. He could have rested here with us."

"Better for him to keep his voice perfectly quiet. To-night is his début. He has got to pay back over three years to Crayford with his performance to-night. And we shall have him with us at supper."

Charmian moved again, pushed the cushions away from her.

"Yes, I've ordered it, a wonderful supper, all the things you and Alston like best."

"We'll enjoy it."

"Won't we? You sent Miss Mardon the flowers?"

"Yes."

The telephone sounded.

"It is Miss Mardon," Claude said, as he listened. "She's thanking me for the flowers."

"Give her my love and best wishes for to-night."

Claude obeyed, and added his own in a firm and cheerful voice.

"She's resting, of course," said Charmian.

"Yes."

"Everyone resting. It seems almost ghastly."

"Why?" he said, laughing.

"Oh, I don't know—death-like. I'm stupid to-day."

She longed to say, "I am full of forebodings!" But she was held back by the thought, "Shall I fail in resolution at

the last moment, show the white feather when he is so cool, so master of himself? I who have been such a courageous wife, who have urged him on, who have made this day possible!"

"It's only the physical reaction," she added hastily. "After all we've gone through."

"Oh, we mustn't give way to reaction yet. We've got the big thing in front of us. All the rest is nothing in comparison with to-night."

"I know! I hope Madre will cable. If she doesn't, it will seem like a bad omen. I shall feel as if she didn't care what happens."

He said nothing.

"Won't you?" she asked.

"I think she will cable. But even if she doesn't, I know she always cares very much what happens to you and me. Nothing would ever make me doubt that."

"No, of course not. But I do want her to show it, to prove it to us to-day. It is such a day in our lives! Never, so long as we live, can we have such another day. It is the day I dreamed of, the day I foresaw, that night at Covent Garden."

She felt a longing, which she checked, to add, "It is the day I decreed when I looked at Henriette Sennier!" But though she checked the longing, its birth had brought to her hope. She, a girl, had decreed this day and her decree had been obeyed. Her will had been exerted, and her will had triumphed. Nothing could break down that fact. Nothing could ever take from her the glory of that achievement. And it seemed to point to the ultimate glory for which she had been living so long, for which she had endured so patiently. Suddenly her restlessness increased, but it was no longer merely the restlessness of unquiet nerves. Anticipation whipped her to movement, and she sprang up abruptly from the sofa.

"Claude, I can't stay in here! I can't rest. Don't ask me to. Anything else, but not that!"

She went to him, put her hands on his shoulders.

"Be a dear! Take me out!"

"Where to?"

"Anywhere! Fifth Avenue, Central Park! Let us walk! I know! Let us walk across the park and look at the theater, our theater. A walk will do me more good than you can dream of, genius though you are. And the time will pass quickly. I want it to fly. I want it to be night. I want to see the crowd. I want to hear it. How can we sit here in this hot red room waiting? Take me out!"

Claude was glad to obey her. They wrapped themselves up, for it was a bitter day, and went down to the hall. As they passed the bureau the well-dressed, smooth-faced men behind the broad barrier looked at them with a certain interest and smiled. Charmian glanced round gaily and nodded to them.

"I am sure they are all wishing us well!" she said to Claude. "I quite love Americans."

"A taxi, sir?" asked a big man in uniform outside.

"No, thank you."

They went to the left and turned into Fifth Avenue.

How it roared that day! An endless river of motor-cars poured down it. Pedestrians thronged the pavements, hurrying by vivaciously, brimming with life, with vigor, with purpose. The nations, it seemed, were there. For the types were many, and called up before the imagination a great vision of the world, not merely a conception of New York or of America. Charmian looked at the faces flitting past and thought:

"What a world it is to conquer!"

"Isn't it splendid out here!" she said. "What an almost maddening whirl of life. Faces, faces, faces, and brains and souls behind them. I love to see all these faces to-day. I feel the brains and the souls are wanting something that you are going to give them."

"Let us hope one or two out of the multitude may be!"

"One or two! Claudie, you miserable niggard! You always think yourself unwanted. But you will see to-night. Every reserved seat and every box is taken, every single one! Think of that—and all because of what you have done. Are we going to Central Park?"

"Unless you wish to promenade up and down Fifth Avenue."

"No, I did say the Park, and we will go there. But let us walk near the edge, not too far away from this marvellous city. Never was there a city like New York for life. I'm sure of that. It's as if every living creature had quicksilver in his veins—or her veins. For I never saw such vital women as one sees here anywhere else! Oh, Claude! When you conquer these wonderful women!"

Her vivacity and excitement were almost unnatural.

"New York intoxicates me to-day!" she exclaimed.

"How are you going to do without it?"

"When we go?"

"Yes, when we go home?"

"Home? But where is our home?"

"In Kensington Square, I suppose."

"I don't feel as if we should ever be able to settle down there again. That little house saw our little beginnings, when we didn't know what we really meant to do."

"Djenan-el-Maqui then?"

"Ah!" she said, with a changed voice. "Djenan-el-Maqui! What I have felt there! More than I ever can tell you, Claudie."

She began to desire the comparative quiet of the Park, and was glad that just then they passed the Plaza Hotel and went toward it.

"I wonder how Enid Mardon is feeling," she said, looking up at the ranges of windows. "Which is the tenth floor where she is?"

"Don't ask me to count to-day. I would rather play with the squirrels."

They were among the trees now and walked on briskly. Both of them needed movement and action, something to "take them out of themselves." A gray squirrel ran down from its tree with a waving tail and crossed just in front of them slowly. Charmian followed it with her eyes. It had an air of cheerful detachment, of self-possession, almost of importance, as if it were fully conscious of its own value in the scheme of the universe, whatever others might think.

"How contented that little beast looks," said Claude.

"But it can never be really happy, as you and I could be, as we are going to be."

"No, perhaps not. But there's the other side."

He quoted Dante:

"*Quanto la cosa è più perfetta più senta il bene, e cosi la doglienza.*"

"I don't wish to prove that I'm high up in the scale by suffering," she said. "Do you?"

"Ought not the artist to be ready for every experience?" he answered.

And she thought she detected in his voice a creeping of irony.

"We are getting near to the theater," she said presently, when they had walked for a time in silence. "Let us keep in the Park till we are close to it, and then just stand and look at it for a moment from the opposite side of the way."

"Yes," he said.

Evening was falling as they stood before the great building, the home of their fortune of the night. The broad roadway lay between them and it. Carriages rolled perpetually by, motor-cars glided out of the dimness of one distance into the dimness of the other. Across the flood of humanity they gazed at the great blind building, which would soon be brilliantly lit up for them, because of what they had done. The carriages, the motor-cars filed by. A little later and they would stop in front of the monster, to give it the food it desired, to fill its capacious maw. And out of every carriage, out of every motor-car, would step a judge, or judges, prepared to join in the great decision by which was to be decided a fate. Both Claude and Charmian were thinking of this as they stood together, while the darkness gathered about them and the cold wind eddied by. And Charmian longed passionately to have the power to hypnotize all those brains into thinking Claude's work wonderful, all those hearts into loving it. For a moment the thought of the human being's independence almost appalled her.

"It looks cold and almost dead now," she murmured. "How different it will look in a few hours!"

"Yes."

They still stood there, almost like two children, fascinated by the sight of the theater. Charmian was rapt. For a moment she forgot the passers-by, the gliding motor-cars, the noises of the city, even herself. She was giving herself imaginatively to fate, not as herself, but merely as a human life. She was feeling the profound mystery of human life held in the arms of destiny. An abrupt movement of Claude almost startled her.

"What is it?" she said.

She looked up at him quickly.

"What's the matter, Claude?"

"Nothing," he answered. "But it's time we went back to the hotel. Come along."

And without another glance at the theater he turned round and began to walk quickly.

He had seen on the other side of the way, going toward the theater, the colored woman in the huge pink hat, of whom he had caught a glimpse on the night when Alston Lake had fetched him and Charmian to see the rehearsal of the "locust-effect." The woman turned her head, seemed to gaze at him across the road with her bulging eyes, stretched her thick lips in a smile. Then she took her place in a queue which was beginning to lengthen outside one of the gallery doors of the theater.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE great theater which Jacob Crayford had built to "knock out" the Metropolitan Opera House filled slowly. Those dark and receding galleries, which had drawn the eyes of Charmian, were already crowded, alive with white moving faces, murmurous with voices. In the corridors and the lobbies many men were standing and talking. Smartly dressed women began to show themselves in the curving ranges of boxes. Musical critics and newspaper men gathered in knots and discussed the musical season, the fight that was "on" between the two opera houses, the libretto-scandal, which had not yet entirely died down, Jacob Crayford's prospects of becoming a really great power in opera.

Crayford's indomitable pluck and determined spending of money, had impressed the American imagination. There were many who wished him well. The Metropolitan Opera House, with the millionaires behind it, could be trusted to take care of itself. Crayford was spending his own money, won entirely by his own enterprise, cleverness and grit. He was a man. Men instinctively wished to see him get in front. And to-night Claude stood side by side with Crayford, his chosen comrade in the battle. Critics and newspaper men were disposed to lift him on their shoulders if only he gave them the chance. The current of opinion favored him. Report of his work was good. Jaded critics, newspaper men who had seen and known too much, longed for novelty. Crayford's prophecy was coming true. America was turning its bright and sharp eyes toward the East. And out of the East, said rumor, this new opera came. Surely it would bring with it a breath of that exquisite air which prevails where the sands lift their golden crests, the creaking rustle of palm trees, the silence of the naked spaces where God lives without man, the chatter, the cries, the tinkling stream voices of the oases.

Even tired men and men who had seen too much knew

anticipation to-night. Word had gone around that Crayford had brought the East to America. People were eager to take their places upon his magic carpet.

The crowd in the lobbies increased. The corridors were thronged.

Van Brinen passed by, walking slowly, and looking about him with his rather pathetic eyes. He saw Jacob Crayford, smartly dressed, a white flower in his buttonhole, standing in a group of pressmen, went up to him and gently took him by the arm.

"Hulloh, Van Brinen! Going to be kind to us to-night?"

"I hope so. Your man is a man of value."

"Heath? And if he weren't, d'you think I'd be spending my last dollar on him? But what do you know of his music more than the others?"

And Crayford's eyes, become suddenly sharp and piercing, fixed themselves on the critic's face.

"I heard some of it one night in his room at the St. Regis."

"Bits of the opera?"

"One bit. But there was something else that impressed me enormously—almost terrible music."

"Oh, that was probably some of his Bible rubbish. But thank the Lord we've got him away from all that. Hulloh, Perkins! Come here to see me get in front?"

In box fifteen, on the ground tier, Mrs. Shiffney settled herself with Madame Sennier, Jacques Sennier, and Jonson Ramer. Susan Fleet was next door with friends, a highly cultivated elderly man, famous as a lawyer and connoisseur, and his wife. Alston Lake's family and most of his many friends were in the stalls, where Armand Gillier had a seat close to a gangway, so that he could easily slip out to pay his homage to Enid Mardon. His head was soaked with eau-de-quinine. On his muscular hands he wore thick white kid gloves. And he gazed at his name on the programme with almost greedy eyes.

Mrs. Shiffney glanced swiftly about the immense house, looking from box to box. She took up her opera glasses.

"I wonder where the Heaths are sitting," she said. "Henriette, can you see them?"

Madame Sennier looked round with her hard yellow eyes.

"No. Perhaps they aren't here yet. Or they may be above us. Or perhaps they are too nervous to come."

Her painted lips stretched themselves in a faint and enigmatic smile.

"I'm quite sure Charmian Heath will be here. This is to be the great night of her life. She is not the woman to miss it."

Mrs. Shiffney leaned round to the next box.

"Susan, can you see the Heaths?"

"Yes," returned the theosophist, in her calm chest voice. "She is just coming into a box on the same tier as we are in."

"Where? Where?"

"Over there, on my right, about ten boxes from us. She is in pale green."

"That pretty woman!" said the elderly lawyer. "Is she the composer's wife?"

He put up his glasses.

"Yes, I see now," said Mrs. Shiffney.

She drew back into her box.

"There she is, Henriette! She seems to be alone. But Heath is sitting behind her in the shadow. I saw him for a minute before he sat down."

Madame Sennier looked at Charmian as Charmian had once looked at her across another opera house. But her mind contemplated Charmian in this hour of her destiny implacably. She said nothing.

Jacques Sennier began to chatter.

At a few minutes past eight the lights went down and the opera began.

Charmian and Claude were alone in their box. On the empty seat beside hers Charmian had laid some red roses sent to her by Alston Lake before she had started. Five minutes after the arrival of the flowers had come a cablegram from England addressed to Claude: "I wish you both the best to-night love. Madre."

Just before the opera began, as Charmian glanced down at her roses, she saw a paper lying beside them on the silk-covered chair.

"What's that?" she said.

"Madre's cablegram," said Claude. "I found I had brought it with me, so I laid it down there. If Madre had come with us she might have occupied that seat. I thought I would let her wish lie there with Alston's roses."

Their eyes met in the shadow of the box. On coming into it Claude had turned out the electric burner.

"It's strange to think of Madre in Berkeley Square to-night," said Charmian slowly. "I wonder what she is doing."

"I am quite sure she is alone, up in her reading-room thinking of us, in one of her white dresses."

"And wishing us—" she paused.

The first notes of the Prelude sounded in the hidden orchestra.

Claude fixed his mind on the thought of Madre, in a white dress, sitting alone in the well-known quiet room, thinking of him—in that moment he was an egoist—wishing him the best. He could almost see Madre's face rise up before him, as it must have looked when she wrote that cablegram, a face kind, intense, with fire, sorrow, and love in the burning eyes. And the thought of that face helped him very much just then, more than he would have thought it possible that anything could help him, was a firm and a tender friend to him in a difficult crisis of his life.

He sat back in the shadow behind Charmian in a sort of strange loneliness, conscious of the enormous crowd around him. He could not see the members of this crowd. He saw only Charmian in her pale green gown, with a touch of green in her cloud of dark hair, and a long way off the stage. He heard perpetually his own music. But to-night it did not seem to him to be his own. He listened to it with a kind of dreadful and supreme detachment, as if it had nothing to do with him. But he listened with great intensity, with all his critical intelligence at work, and with—so at least it seemed to him—his heart prepared to be touched, moved. It was not a hard heart which was beating that night in the breast of Claude, nor was it the foolish, emotional heart of the partisan, lost to the touch of reason, to the influence of the deepest truth which a man of any genius dare not deny. No critic

in the vast theater that night listened to Claude's opera more dispassionately than did Claude himself. Sometimes he thought of the colored woman in the huge pink hat. He knew she was somewhere in the theater, probably far up in that dim gallery toward which he had looked at rehearsal, when the building had presented itself to his imagination as a monster waiting heavily to be fed. On this one night at least he had fed it full. Was not *she* stretching her great lips in a smile?

Sometimes Claude heard faint movements, slight coughing, little sounds like minute whispers from the crowd. Now and then there was applause. Alston Lake was applauded strongly once after a phrase which showed off his magnificent voice, and Charmian looked quickly round at Claude with cheeks flushing, and shining eyes, which said plainly, "It is coming! Listen! The triumph is on the way!" Then the widespread silence of an attentive crowd fell again, like some vast veil falling, and Claude attended intensely to the music as if it were the music of another.

After the first act there was more applause, which sounded in their box rather strong in patches but scattered. The singers were called three times, but always in this unconcentrated way.

"It's going splendidly. They like it!" said Charmian quickly. "Three calls. That's unusual after a first act, when the audience hasn't warmed up. Isn't it odd, Claudie, that Americans always applaud quite differently from the way the English do? They always applaud like that."

She had turned right round and was almost facing him.

"How do you mean?" he said.

"Didn't you notice? Persistently, but in clumps as it were. It is by their persistence they show how pleased they are, rather than by their—their—I hardly know just how to put it."

"By their unanimity perhaps."

"Oh, no! Not exactly that! Here's Mr. Crayford."

Crayford slipped in, but only stayed for a moment.

"Hear that applause?" he said. "They're mad about it. Alston's got them. I knew he would. That boy's going

to be famous. But wait till the second act. They're in a fine humor, only asking to be pleased. I know the signs. The libretto's hit them hard. They're all asking what's to happen next."

"You're satisfied then?" said Charmian.

"Satisfied! I'm so happy I don't know what to do."

He was gone.

"He knows!" Charmian said.

Her eyes were fixed upon Claude. They looked almost defiant.

"If anyone in America knows what he is talking about I suppose it is Mr. Crayford," she added.

There was a tap at the door. Claude opened it and two of their American friends came in and stayed a few minutes, saying how well the opera was going, how much they liked it, how splendidly it was "put on"—all the proper and usual things which are said by proper and usual persons on such occasions. One of them was an acquaintance of Van Brinen's. Claude asked him if Van Brinen were in the house. He said yes. Claude then inquired whether Van Brinen knew the number of his box, and was told that he did know it. The conversation turned to other topics, but when the two men had gone out Charmian said:

"Why did you ask those questions about Mr. Van Brinen, Claudie?"

"Only because I thought if he knew where our box was he might pay us a visit. No one has been more friendly with us than he has."

"I see. He's certain to come after the next act. Ah! the lights are going down."

She had been standing for a few minutes. Now she moved to sit down. Before doing so she drew her chair a little way back in the box.

"I don't want to be distracted from the stage—my attention, I mean—by seeing too many people," she whispered, in explanation of her action. "You are quite right to keep at the back. One can listen much better if one doesn't see too much of the audience."

Claude said nothing. The curtains were parting.

The second act was listened to by the vast audience in a silence that was almost complete.

Now and then Charmian whispered a word or two to Claude. Once she said:

"Isn't it wonderful, the silence of a crowd? Doesn't it show how absorbed they are?"

And again:

"I think it's such a mercy that modern methods of composition give no opportunity to the audience to break in with applause. Any interruption would ruin the effect of the act as a whole."

Claude just moved his head in reply.

Everything was satisfactory. Jacob Crayford had been right. The opera was ready for production and was "going" without a hitch. The elaborate scenic effects were working perfectly. Miss Mardon had never been more admirable, more completely mistress of her art. Nor had she ever looked more wonderful. Alston Lake's success was assured. His voice filled the great house without difficulty. Even Charmian and Claude were surprised by its volume and beauty.

"Isn't Alston splendid?" whispered Charmian once.

"Yes," Claude replied.

He added, after a pause:

"Dear old Alston is safe."

Charmian turned her face toward the stage. Now and then she moved rather restlessly in her chair. She had a fan with her and began to use it. Then she laid it down on the ledge of the box, then took it up again, opened it, closed it, and kept it in her hand. She felt the audience almost like a weight laid upon her. Their silent attention began to frighten her. She knew that was ridiculous, that if this production did not intimately concern her the audience's silence would not strike her as strange. People listening attentively are always silent. She blamed herself for her absurdity. Leaning a little forward she could just see the outline of Madame Sennier, sitting very upright in the front of her box, with one arm and hand on the ledge. Crayford, who was determined to be "in the front artistically," kept the theater very dark when the curtain was up, in order to focus the attention of the audience

on the stage. To Charmian, Madame Sennier looked like a shade, erect, almost strangely motionless, implacable. This shade drew Charmian's eyes as the act went on. She did not move her seat forward again, but she often leaned forward a little. A shade with a brain, a heart and a soul! What were they doing to-night? Charmian remembered the attempt to get the libretto away from Claude, Madame Sennier's remarks about Claude after the return from Constantine. The shade had done her utmost to ensure that this first night should never be. She had failed. And now she was sitting over there tasting her own failure. Charmian stared at her trying to triumph. All the time she was listening to the music, was saying to herself how splendid it was. They had made great sacrifices for it. And it was splendid. That was their reward.

The music sounded strangely new to her in this environment. She had heard it all at Djenan-el-Maqui, on the piano, sung by Alston and hummed by Claude. She had felt it, sometimes deeply on nights of excitement, when Claude had played till the stars were fading. She had had her favorite passages, which had always come to her out of the midst of the opera like friends, smiling, or passionate, or perhaps weeping, tugging at her heart-strings, stirring longings that were romantic. At the rehearsals she had heard the opera with the singers, the orchestra.

Yet now it seemed to her new and strange. The great audience had taken it, had changed it, was showing it to her now, was saying to her: "This is the opera of the composer, Claude Heath, a man hitherto unknown." And presently it seemed to be saying to her with insistence:

"It is useless for you to pretend to be apart from me, separate from me. For you belong to me. You are part of me. Your thought is part of my thought, your feeling is part of mine. You are nothing but a drop in me and I am the ocean."

Charmian felt as if she were struggling against this attempt of the audience to take possession of her, were fighting to preserve intact her independence, her individuality. But it became almost the business of a nightmare, this strange and unequal struggle in the artistic darkness devised by Crayford.

And the audience seemed to be gaining in strength, like an adversary braced up by conflict.

Conflict! The word had appeared like a criminal in Charmian's mind. She strove vehemently to banish it. There was, there could be no conflict in such a matter as was now in hand. But, oh! this portentous silence!

It came to an end at last. The curtain fell, and applause broke forth. It resembled the applause after the first act. And once more there were three calls for the singers. Then the clapping died away and conversation broke out, spreading over the crowd. Many people got up from their seats and went out or moved about talking with acquaintances.

"I can see Mr. Van Brinen," said Charmian.

"Can you? Where is he?"

Claude got up slowly, picked up the roses and the cablegram from the chair beside Charmian, put them behind him, and took the chair, bringing it forward quite to the front of the box. As he did so Charmian made a sound like a word half-uttered and checked.

"Where is he?" Claude repeated.

Many people in the stalls were looking at him, were pointing him out. He seemed to ignore the attention fixed upon him.

"There!" said Charmian, in a low voice.

She pointed with her fan, then leaned back.

Claude looked and saw Van Brinen not far off. He was standing up in the stalls, facing the boxes, bending a little and talking to two smartly dressed women. His pale face looked sad. Presently he stood up straight and seemed to look across the intervening heads into Claude's eyes.

"He must see me!" Claude thought. "He does see me!"

Van Brinen stood thus for quite a minute. Then he made his way to one of the exits and disappeared.

"He is coming round to the box, I'm sure," said Charmian cheerfully. "He evidently saw us."

"Yes."

But Van Brinen did not come. Nor did Jacob Crayford. Several others came, however, and there were comments, congratulations. The same things were repeated by several mouths with strangely similar intonations. And Charmian

made appropriate answers. And all the time she kept on saying to herself: "This is my hour of triumph, as Madame Sennier's was at Covent Garden. Only this is America and not England. So of course there is a difference. New York has its way of setting the seal on a triumph and London has its way."

Moved presently to speak out of her mind she said to a Boston man, called Hostatter, who had looked in upon them:

"It is so interesting, I think, to notice the difference between one nation and another in such a matter for instance as this receiving of a new work."

"Very interesting, very interesting," said Hostatter.

"You Americans show what you feel by the intensity of your si—by the intensity, the concentration with which you listen."

"Exactly. And what is a London audience like? I have never been to a London première."

"Oh, more—more boisterous and less intense. Isn't it so, Claude?"

"No doubt there's a difference," said Claude.

"Do you mean they are boisterous at Covent Garden?" said Hostatter, evidently surprised. "I always thought the Covent Garden audience was such a cold one."

"Oh, no, I don't think so," said Charmian.

She remembered the first night of *Le Paradis Terrestre.* Suddenly a chill ran all through her, as if a stream of ice-cold water had trickled upon her.

"Really!" said Hostatter. "And yet we Americans are said to have a bad reputation for noise."

He had been smiling, but looked suddenly doubtful.

"But as you say," he added, rather hastily, "in a theater we concentrate, especially when we are presented with something definitely artistic, as we are to-night."

He shook hands.

"Definitely artistic. My most sincere congratulations."

He went out, and another man called Stephen Clinch, an ally of Crayford's immediately came in. After a few minutes of conversation he said:

"Everybody is admiring the libretto. First-rate stuff,

isn't it? I expected to find the author with you. Isn't he in the house??"

"Yes, but he told us he would sit in the stalls," said Charmian.

"Haven't you seen him?"

"No," said Claude.

"Well, of course you'll appear after the next act with him. There's sure to be a call. And I know Gillier will be called for as well as you."

His rather cold gray eyes seemed to examine the two faces before him almost surreptitiously. Then he, too, went out of the box.

"A call after this act!" said Charmian.

"I believe they generally summon authors and composers after the penultimate act over here."

"You'll take the call, of course, Claudie?"

There was a silence. Then he said:

"Yes, I shall take it."

His voice was hard. Charmian scarcely recognized it.

"Then you'll have to go behind the scenes."

"Yes."

"Will you—"

"I'll wait till the curtain goes up, and then slip out."

Again there was a silence. Charmian broke it at length by saying:

"I think Monsieur Gillier might have come to see us to-night. It would have been natural if he had visited our box."

"Perhaps he will come presently."

A bell sounded. The third act was about to begin.

Soon after the curtains had once more parted, disclosing a marvellous desert scene which drew loud applause from the audience, Claude got up softly from his seat.

"I'll slip away now," he whispered.

She felt for his hand in the dimness, found it, squeezed it. She longed to get up, to put her lips to his, to breath some word—she knew not the word it would be—of encouragement, of affection. Tears rushed into her eyes as she felt the touch of his flesh. As the door shut behind him she moved quite to the back of the box and put her handkerchief

to her eyes. She had great difficulty just then in not letting the tears run over her face. For several minutes she scarcely heard the music or knew what was happening upon the stage. There was a tumult of feeling within her which she did not at all fully understand, perhaps because even now she was fighting, fighting blindly, desperately, but with courage.

There came a tap at the door. Charmian did not hear it. In a moment it was softly repeated. This time she did hear it. And she hastily pressed her handkerchief first against one eye, then against the other, got up and opened the door.

"May I come in for a little while?" came a calm whisper from Susan Fleet, who stood without in a very plain black gown with long white gloves over her hands and arms.

"Oh, Susan—yes! I am all alone."

"That is why I came."

"How did you know?"

"My friend, Mr. Melton, happened to be in the corridor with Mr. Ramer and they saw your husband pass. Mr. Ramer spoke to him and he said he was going behind the scenes. So I thought I would come for a minute."

She stepped gently in and closed the door quietly.

"Where were you sitting?" she whispered.

"Here, at the back. Sit by me—oh, wait! Let me move Alston's flowers."

She took them up. As she did so she remembered Madre's cablegram, and looked for it. But it was no longer there. She searched quickly on the floor.

"What is it?" said Susan.

"Only a cablegram from Madre that was with the flowers. It's gone. Never mind. Claude must have taken it."

The conviction came to her that Claude had taken it with him, as a man takes a friend he can trust when he is going into a "tight place."

"Sit here!" she whispered to Susan.

Susan sat softly down beside Charmian at the back of the box, took one of her hands and held it, not closely, but gently. They did not speak again till the third act was finished.

It was the longest act of the opera, and the most elaborate.

Charmian had always secretly been afraid of it since the first full rehearsal. She could never get out of her mind the torture she had endured that evening when everything had gone wrong, when she had said to herself in a sort of fierce and active despair: "This is my idea of Hell." She felt that even if the opera were a triumphant success, even if the third act were acclaimed, she would always dread it, almost as a woman may dread an enemy. Once it had tortured her, and she had a feminine memory for a thing that had caused her agony.

Now she sat with her hand in Susan's, face to face with the dangerous act, and anticipating the end, when at last Claude would confront the world he had avoided so carefully till she came into his life.

The act, which had been chaotic at rehearsal, was going with perfect smoothness, almost too smoothly Charmian began to think. It glided on its way almost with a certain blandness. In Algeria, Crayford had devoted most of his attention to this act, which he had said "wanted a lot of doing to." He had "made" the whole of it "over." Charmian remembered now very well the long discussions which had taken place at Djenan-el-Maqui about this act. One discussion stood out from the rest at this moment. She almost felt the heat brooding over the far-off land. She almost saw the sky shrouded in filmy gray, the white edge of the sea breaking sullenly against the long line of shore, the beads of sweat on the forehead of Claude, his clenched hands, the expression in his eyes when he said, after her answered challenge to Crayford, "Tell me what you want, all you want, and I'll try to do it."

This act to which this vast audience, in which she was now definitely included against her will, was listening was the product of that scene, that discussion, that resignation of Claude's.

Charmian's hand twitched under Susan's, but she did not draw it away, though Susan—as she knew—would have made no effort to retain it. She was thankful Susan was with her. To-night it was impossible for her to feel calm. No one could have communicated calm to her. But Susan did give her something which was a help to her. Always, when with Susan, she was able to feel, however vaguely, something of

the universal, something of the largeness which men feel when they look at the stars, or hear the wind across vast spaces, or see a great deed done. As the act ran its course her mind became fixed upon the close, upon the call for Claude. Armand Gillier was blotted out from her mind. The cry that went up would be for Claude. Would it be a cry from the heart of this crowd? She remembered, she even heard distinctly in her mind, the cry the Covent Garden crowd had sent up for Jacques Sennier on the first night of *Le Paradis Terrestre.* There had been in it a marvellous sound which had stirred her to the depths. It was that sound which had made her speak to Claude, which had determined her marriage with Claude.

If a similar sound burst from the lips and the hearts of the crowd at the end of this act, it would determine Claude's fate as an artist, her fate with his.

Her hand twitched more convulsively under Susan's as she thought of, waited for, the sound.

The locust scene was a triumph for Crayford, Mr. Mulworth, and Jimber. The scene which succeeded it was a triumph for Alston Lake. Whatever else this night might bring forth one thing was certain; Alston had "made good." He had "won out" and justified Crayford's belief in him. Even his father, reluctantly sitting in the stalls after a hard day in Wall Street, was obliged to be proud of his boy.

"Dear old Alston!" Charmian found herself whispering. "He's a success. Alston's a success—a success!"

She kept on forming the last word, and willing with all her might.

"Success! Success—it is coming; it is ours! In a moment we shall know it, we shall have it! Success! Success!"

With her soul and—it seemed to her—with her whole body, tense in the pretty green gown so carefully chosen for the great night, she willed, she called upon, she demanded success. And then she prayed for success. She shut her eyes, prayed hard, went on praying, marshalling all she and Claude had done before the Unseen Power, as reason for the blessing she entreated. And while she prayed, her hand ceased from twitching in Susan Fleet's.

Long though the third act was, at last it drew near its end. And then Charmian began to be afraid, terribly afraid. She feared the decisive moment. She wished she were not in the theater. She thought of the asking eyes of the pressmen, expressing silently but definitely the great demand of this wonderful city, this wonderful country: "Be a success!" If that demand were not complied with! She recalled the notoriety she and Claude had had out here, the innumerable attentions which had been showered upon them, the interest which had been shown in them, the expectations aroused by Claude. She recalled the many allusions that had been made to herself in the papers, the interviews with the "clever wife" who had done so much for her husband, the columns about her expedition to Paris to get Gillier's libretto for Claude. Crayford had taken good care that the "little lady" should have her full share of the limelight. Now, through shut eyelids she saw it blaze like an enemy.

If the opera should go down despite all that had been done how could she endure the situation that would be hers? But it would not go down. She remembered that she had once heard that fear of a thing attracts that thing to you. Was she who had been so full of will, so resolute, so persistent, so marvellously successful up to a point, going to be a craven now, going to show the white feather? When that evening began she had been sitting in the front of the box, in full view of the audience. Now she was sitting in the shadow, clasping a woman's hand. Claude had gone to the front of the box when she retreated. Now, in a very few minutes, he was going to face the great multitude. He was showing will, grit, to-night. And she felt, she knew, that, whatever the occasion, there was in Claude something strong enough to turn a bold front to it to-night, perhaps on any night or any day of the year. She must help him. Whether he could see her from the stage, she did not know She doubted it. But he knew where she was sitting. He might look for her at such a moment. He might miss her if she were hidden away in the shadow like a poltroon.

She drew her hand away from Susan's, got up, and took her place alone in the front of the box, in sight of all the

people in the stalls, in sight also of Mrs. Shiffney and Madame Sennier. Susan remained where she was. She felt that Charmian needed to be alone just then. She liked her for the impulse which she had divined.

At last the curtain fell.

People applauded.

"This is the American way," Charmian was saying to herself. "Not our way! But they keep on! That shows it is a success. I mustn't think of Covent Garden."

Nevertheless, with her ears, and with her whole soul, she was listening for that wonderful sound, heard at the Covent Garden, the sound that stirs, that excites, that is soul in utterance.

"This is for the singers," she said to herself, "not for Claude. Bravo, Alston! Bravo! Bravo!"

The sound from the audience suddenly rose as Alston Lake showed himself, and, as it did so, Charmian was sharply, and deliciously, conscious of the long power that lay behind, like a stretching avenue leading down into the soul of the audience.

"Ah, they can be as we are!" she thought. "They are only waiting to show it. I am going to hear the sound."

With a sharp change of mood she exulted. She savored the triumph that was close at hand. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes shone, her heart beat violently.

"The sound! The sound!"

The last of the singers disappeared behind the curtain. The applause continued persistently, but, so at least it must have seemed to English ears, lethargically. A few cries were heard.

"They are calling for Claude!"

Charmian turned round to Susan Fleet. Susan was clapping her hands forcibly. She stood up as if to make her applause more audible.

The cries went up again. But in the stalls the applause seemed to be dying down, and Charmian had a moment of such acute, such exquisite apprehension, that always afterward she felt as if she had known the bitterness of death. Scarcely knowing what she did, and suddenly quite pale, she began to clap with Susan. She felt like one fighting against terrible odds. And the enemy sickened her because it was

full of a monstrous passivity. It seemed to exhale inertia. To fight against it was like struggling against being smothered by a gigantic feather bed.

But she clapped, she clapped. And as she did so, moved to look round, she saw Mrs. Shiffney and Madame Sennier watching her through two pairs of opera-glasses.

Her hands fell apart, dropped to her sides mechanically.

Still cries, separated, far, it seemed, from one another, went up.

"Heath! Heath!" Charmian now heard distinctly.

"Gillier! Author! Author!"

The curtains moved. One was drawn back. A strangely shaped gap showed itself. But for a long moment no one emerged through this gap. And again the applause died down. Charmian sat quite still, her arms hanging, her eyes fixed on the gap, her cheeks still very white.

Just as the applause seemed fading beyond recall Claude stepped through the gap, followed by Armand Gillier.

Once more the cries were heard. The applause revived. Charmian gazed at Claude. His face, she thought, looked set but quite calm. He stood at the very edge of the stage, and she saw him look, not toward where she was, but up to the gallery as if in search of someone. Then he stepped back. He had come to the audience before Gillier. He now disappeared before Gillier, who seemed about to follow him closely, hesitated, looked round once more at the audience, and stood for an instant alone on the stage.

Then suddenly came from the audience the sound!

It was less full, less strong, less intense than it had been at Covent Garden on the night of the first performance of *Le Paradis Terrestre*. But essentially it was the same sound.

Charmian heard it and her lips grew pale. But she sat well forward in the box, and, though she saw two opera-glasses levelled at her, she lifted her hands again and clapped till Armand Gillier passed out of sight.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN the red sitting-room at the St. Regis Hotel a supper-table was laid for three people. It was decorated with some lilies-of-the-valley and white heather, which Jacob Crayford had sent in the afternoon to the "little lady." On a table near stood a gilded basket of tulips, left by Gillier with a formal note. The elderly German waiter, who looked like a very respectable butler, placed a menu beside the lilies and the heather soon after the clock struck twelve. Then he glanced at the clock, compared it with his silver watch, and retired to see that the champagne was being properly iced. He returned, with a subordinate, about half-past twelve, and began to arrange an ice pail, from which the neck of a bottle protruded, and other things on a side table. While he was still in the room he heard voices in the corridor, and the three people for whom the preparations had been made came in.

"Supper is ready? That's right!" Charmian said, in a high and gay voice.

She turned.

"Doesn't the table look pretty, Alston, with Mr. Crayford's white heather?"

She had Alston's red roses in her hand.

"I am going to put your roses in water now."

She turned again to the waiter.

"Could I have some water put in that vase, please? And we'll have supper at once."

"Certainly, ma'am!"

"Come and see the menu, both of you, and tell me if you are satisfied with it."

She picked it up and handed it to Alston.

"And then show it to Claude while I take off my cloak."

She went away, smiling.

The waiters had gone out for a moment. The two friends were alone together.

Claude put his arm round Alston Lake's shoulder.

"Alston, this has been my first chance to congratulate you without a lot of people round us, or—really to tell you, I mean, how fine your performance was. There is no doubt that you are a made man from to-night. I am glad for you. You've worked splendidly, and you deserve this great success."

Alston wrung his friend's hand.

"Thank you, Claude. But I only got my chance through you and Mrs. Charmian. If you hadn't composed a splendid opera, I couldn't have scored in it."

"You would have scored in something else. You are going to."

"I shall never enjoy singing any rôle so much as I have enjoyed singing your Spahi."

"I don't see how you are ever going to sing any rôle better," said Claude.

Their hands fell apart as Charmian quickly came in.

"You've put your coats in the lobby? That's right. Oh, here is supper! Caviare first! I'll sit here. Oh, Alston, what a comfort to be quietly here with just you and Claude after all the excitement!"

For a moment her mouth dropped, but only for a moment.

"But I'm wonderfully little tired!" she continued. "It all went so splendidly, without a single hitch. Mr. Crayford must be enchanted. I only saw him for a moment coming out after I had congratulated Miss Mardon. There were so many people. There was no time to hear all he thought. But there could not be two opinions. Claudie, do you feel quite finished?"

"No," said Claude, in a strong voice, which broke in almost strangely upon her lively chattering.

Both Charmian and Alston looked at him for an instant with a sort of inquiry, which in Charmian was almost furtive.

"That's good!" Charmian began, after a little pause. "I was almost afraid—here's the champagne! We ought to drink a toast to-night, I think. Suppose we—"

"We'll drink to Alston's career," interrupted Claude. And he lifted his glass.

"Alston!" said Charmian, swiftly following his example.

"And now no more toasts for the present. They seem too formal when only we three are together. And we know what we wish each other without them. Oyster soup! You see, I remembered what you are fond of, Claudie. I recollect ages ago in London I once met Mr. Whistler. It was when I was very small. He came to lunch with Madre. By the way, Claude, did you take Madre's cablegram with you when you went to answer your call?"

"Yes."

"I thought you had, because I couldn't find it. Well Mr. Whistler came to lunch with us, Alston. And he talked about nothing but oysters."

"Was he painting them at the time? A nocturne of natives?"

"How absurd you are! But he knew everything that could be known about Blue Points—"

She ran on vivaciously. Alston seconded her, when she gave him an opportunity. Claude listened, sometimes smiled, spoke when there seemed to be any necessity for a word from him. Alston was hungry after his exertions, and ate heartily. Charmian pretended to eat and sipped her champagne. On each of her cheeks an almost livid spot of red glowed. Her eyes, which looked more sunken than usual in her head, were full of intense life, as they glanced perpetually from one man to the other with a ceaseless watchfulness. She pressed Claude to eat, even helped him herself from the dishes. The clock had just struck a quarter-past one when a buzzing sound outside indicated the presence of someone at the door of the lobby.

Charmian moved uneasily.

"Who can it be so late? Perhaps it's Mr. Crayford."

She got up.

"I'll go and see what it is," said Claude.

He went out. Charmian stood, watching the door.

"D'you think it's Mr. Crayford?" she asked of Alston Lake.

"Hardly!"

"What is it, Claude?"

"A note or letter."

"A letter! Whom can it be from! Has it only come now?"

"Apparently."

"Do read it. But have you finished?"

"Quite. I couldn't eat anything more."

He went to the sofa, behind which, on a table, an electric light was burning, sat down and tore the envelope which he held. Charmian and Alston remained at the supper-table. Charmian had sat down again. She gazed at Claude, and saw him draw out of the envelope not a note, but a letter. He began to read it, and read it slowly. And as he did so Charmian saw his face change. Once or twice his jaw quivered. His brows came down. He turned sideways on the sofa. Very soon she saw that he was with difficulty controlling some strong emotion. She began to talk to Alston Lake and turned her eyes away from her husband. But presently she heard the rustle of paper and looked again. Claude, with a hand which slightly trembled, was putting the letter back into its envelope. When he had done so he put both into the breast-pocket of his evening coat, and sat quite still gazing on the ground. Charmian went on talking, but she did not know what she was saying, and at last she felt that she could not endure to sit any longer at the disordered supper-table. Movement seemed necessary to her body, which felt distressed.

"Do have some more champagne, Alston!" she said.

"Not another drop, Mrs. Charmian, thank, you! I must think of my voice."

"Well, then—"

She pushed back her chair, glanced at Claude. He moved, lifted his eyes.

"Dare you smoke, Alston?" he said.

"I've got to, whether I dare or not. But"—his kind and honest eyes went from Charmian to Claude—"I think, if you don't mind, I'll smoke on the way home. I'll go right away now if you won't think it unfriendly. The fact is I'm a bit tired, and I bet you both are, too. These things take it out of one, unless one is made of cast-iron like Crayford, or steel like Mulworth, or whipcord like Jimber. You must both

want a good long rest after all you've been through over here in God's own country, eh?"

He fetched his coat from the lobby. Claude got up and gave him a cigar, lit it for him.

"Well, Mrs. Charmian—" he said.

He held out his big hand. His fair face flushed a little, and his rather blunt features looked boyish and emotional.

"We've brought it off. We've done our best. Now we can only leave it to the critics and the public."

He squeezed her hand so hard that all the blood seemed to leave it.

"Good-night! I'll come round to-morrow. Good-night."

He seemed reluctant to depart, still held her hand. But at last he just repeated "Good-night!" and let it go.

"Good-night, dear Alston," she murmured.

Claude went with him into the lobby and shut the sitting-room door behind them. She heard their voices talking, but could not hear any words. The voices continued for what seemed to her a long while. She moved about the room, saw Alston's red roses where she had laid them down when she came in from the theater, and the vase full of water which the German waiter had brought. And she began to put the flowers in the water, lifting them carefully and slowly one by one. They had very long stems and all their leaves. She arranged them with apparent sensitiveness. But she was scarcely conscious of what she was doing. When all the roses were in the vase she did not know what else to do. And she stood still listening to the murmur of those voices. At last it ceased. She heard a door shut. Then the sitting-room door opened, and Claude came in.

"What a lot you had to say to each—" she began.

She stopped. Claude's face had stopped her.

"Shall I ring for the waiter to clear away?" she said falteringly, after a moment of silence.

"He came when Alston and I were in the lobby. I told him to leave it all till to-morrow. Do you mind?"

"No."

Claude shut the door. His eyes still held the intensity, the blazing expression which had stopped the words on her

lips. Always Claude's face was expressive. She remembered how forcibly she had been struck by that fact when she walked airily into Max Elliot's music-room. But she had never before seen him look as he was looking now. She felt frightened of him, and almost frightened of herself.

"I had something to say to Alston," Claude said, coming up to her. "I don't think I could have rested to-night unless I had said it. I'm sure I couldn't."

"You were telling him again how splendidly—"

"No. He knew what I thought of his work. I told him that before supper. I had to tell him something else—what I thought of my own."

"What you—what you thought of your own!"

"Yes. What I thought of my own spurious, contemptible, heartless, soulless, hateful work."

"Claude!" she faltered.

"Don't you know it is so? Don't you know I am right? You may have deceived yourself in Algeria. You may have deceived yourself even here at all the rehearsals. But, Charmian"—his eyes pierced her—"do you dare to tell me that to-night, when you were part of an audience, when you were linked with those hundreds and hundreds of listeners, do you dare to tell me you didn't know to-night?"

"How can you—oh, how can you speak like this? Oh, how can you attack your own child?" she cried, finding in herself still a remnant of will, a remnant of the fierceness that belongs to deep feeling of any kind. "It's unworthy. It's cruel, brutal. I can't hear you do it. I won't—"

"Do you mean to tell me that to-night when you sat in the theater you didn't know? Well, if you do tell me so I shall not believe you. No, I shall not believe you."

She was silent, remembering her sense of struggle in the theater, her strong feeling that she was engaged on a sort of horrible, futile fight against the malign power of the audience.

"You see!" he said. "You dare not tell me you didn't know!"

His eyes were always upon her. She opened her lips. She tried to speak, to say that she loved the opera, that she thought it a work of genius, that everyone would recognize it as such

soon, very soon, if not now, immediately. Words seemed to be struggling up in her, but she could not speak them. She felt that she was growing paler and paler beneath his gaze.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, with violence. "You've got some sincerity left in you. We want it, you and I, to-night!"

He turned away from her, went to the sofa, sat down on it, put his hand to the breast-pocket of his coat, and drew out two papers—Madre's cablegram and the letter which had come while they were at supper.

"Come here, Charmian!" he said, more quietly.

She came to him, hesitated, met his eyes again, and sat down in the other corner of the sofa beside him.

"I want you to read that."

He gave her the letter.

"Read it carefully. Don't hurry!" he said.

She took the letter and read.

"My dear Mr. Heath,—I've left the opera-house and have come to the office of my paper to write my article on your work which I have just heard. But before I do so I feel moved to send this letter to you. I don't know what you will think of it, or of me for writing it, but I do care. I want you very much not to hate it, not to think ill of me. People, I believe, very often speak and think badly of us who call ourselves, are called, critics. They say we are venial, that we are log-rollers, that we have no convictions, that we don't know what we are talking about, that we are the failures in art, all that kind of thing. We have plenty of faults, no doubt. But there are some of us who try to be honest. I try to be honest. I am going to try to be honest about your work to-night. That is why I am sending you this.

"Your opera is not a success. I know New York. I dare even to say that I know America. I have sat among American audiences too long not to be able to 'taste' them. Their feeling gets right into me. Your opera is not a success. But it isn't really that which troubles me to-night. It is this. Your opera doesn't deserve to be a success.

"That's the wound!

"I don't know, of course—I can't know—whether you are aware of the wound. But I can't help thinking you must be. It is presumption, I dare say, for a man like me, a mere critic, who couldn't compose a bar of fine genuine music to save his life, to try to dive into the soul of an artist, into your soul. But you are a man who means a lot to me. If you didn't I shouldn't be writing this letter. I believe you know what I know, what the audience knew to-night, that the work you gave them is spurious, unworthy. It no more represents you than the mud and the water that cover a lode of gold represent what the miner is seeking for. I'm pretty sure you must know.

"Perhaps you'll say: 'Then why have the impertinence to tell me?'

"It's because I've seen a little bit of the gold shining. The other night, after I dined with you—you remember? Gold it was, that's certain. We Americans know something about precious metal, or the world belies us. After that night I was looking to write a great article on you. And I'll do it yet. But I can't do it to-night. That's my trouble. And it's a heavy one, heavier than I've had this season. I've got to sit right down and say out the truth. I hate to do it. And yet—do I altogether? I don't want to show up as conceited, yet now, as I'm covering this bit of paper, I've begun to think to myself: Shan't I, perhaps, while I'm doing my article, be helping to clear away a little of the water and the mud that cover the lode? Shan't I, perhaps, be getting the gold a bit nearer to the light of the day, and the gaze of the world? Or, better still, to the hand of the miner? Well, anyhow, I've got to go ahead. I can't do anything else.

"But I remember the other night. And if I believe there's music worth having in any man of our day I believe it's in you.—Your very sincere friend, and your admirer,

"Alfred Van Brinen."

Charmian read this letter slowly, not missing a word. As she read she bent her head lower and lower; she almost crouched over the letter. When she had finished it she sat quite still without raising her eyes for a long time. The letter had van-

ished from her sight. And how much else had vanished! In that moment little or nothing seemed left.

At last, as she did not move, Claude said, "You've finished?"

. . . . . .

"You've finished the letter?"

"Yes."

"May I have it, then?"

She knew he was holding out his hand. She made a great effort, lifted her hand, and gave him Van Brinen's letter without looking at him. She heard the thin paper rustle as he folded it.

"Charmian," he said, "I'm going to keep this letter. Do you know why? Because I love the man who wrote it. Because I know that if ever I am tempted again, by anyone or by anything, to prostitute such powers as have been given me, I have only to look at this letter, I have only to remember to-night, to be saved from my own weakness, from my disease of weakness."

Still she did not look at him. But she noticed in his voice a sound of growing excitement. And now she heard him get up from the sofa.

"But I believe, in any case, what has happened to-night would have cured me. I've had a tremendous lesson to-night. We've both had a tremendous lesson. Do you know that after the call at the end of the third act Armand Gillier very nearly assaulted me?"

"Claude!"

Now she looked up. Claude was standing a little way from her by the piano. With one hand he held fast to the edge of the piano, so fast that the knuckles showed white through the stretched skin.

"Miss Mardon and he realized, as of course everyone else realized, my complete failure which dragged his libretto down. The way the audience applauded him when I left the stage told the story. No other comment was necessary. But Gillier isn't a very delicate person, and he made comments before Miss Mardon, Crayford, and several of the company,

before scene-shifters and stage carpenters, too. What he said was true enough. But it wasn't pleasant to hear it in such company."

He came away from the piano, turned his back on her for a moment, and walked toward the farther wall of the room.

"Oh, I've had my lesson!" she heard him say. "Miss Mardon said nothing to you?"

He had turned.

"No," she said.

"Crayford said nothing?"

"Mr. Crayford was surrounded. He said, 'It's gone grandly. We've all made good. I don't care a snap what the critics say to-morrow.'"

"And you knew he was telling you a lie!"

She was silent.

"You knew the truth, which is this: everyone made good except myself. And everyone will be dragged down in the failure because of me. They've all built on a rotten foundation. They've all built on me. And you—you've built on me. But not one of you, not one, has built on what I really am, on the real me. Not one of you has allowed me to be myself, and you least of all!"

"Claude!"

"You least of all! Don't you know it? Haven't you always known it, from the moment when you resolved to take me in hand, when you resolved to guide me in my art life, to bring the poor weak fellow, who had some talent, but who didn't know how to apply it, into the light of success! You meant to make me from the first, and that meant unmaking the man you had married, the man who had lived apart in the odd, little unfashionable Bayswater house, who had lived the odd, little unfashionable life, composing Te Deums and Bible rubbish, the man whom nobody knew, and who didn't specially want to know anyone, except his friends. You thought I was an eccentricity—"

"No, no!" she almost faltered, bending under the storm of unreserve which had broken in this reserved man.

"An eccentricity, when I was just being simply myself, doing what I was meant to do, what I could do, drawing my

inspiration not from the fashions of the moment but from the subjects, the words, the thoughts, which found their way into my soul. I didn't care whether they had found their way into other people's souls. What did that matter to me? Other people were not my concern. I didn't think about them. I didn't care what they cared for, only what I cared for. I was myself, just that. And from to-night I'm going to be just that, just simply myself again. It's the only chance for an artist." He paused, fixing his eyes upon her till she was forced to lift her eyes to his. "And I believe—I believe in my soul it's the only chance for a man."

He stood looking into her eyes. Then he repeated:

"The only chance for a man."

He went back slowly to the piano, grasped it, held it once more.

"Charmian," he said, "you've done your best. You've drawn me into the world, into the great current of life; you've played upon the surface ambition that I suppose there is in almost every man; you've given me a host of acquaintances; you've turned me from the one or two things that I fancied I might make something of since we married, *The Hound of Heaven*, the violin concerto. On the other side of the account you found me that song, and Lake to sing it. And you got me Gillier's libretto and opened the doors of Crayford's opera-house to me. You've devoted yourself to me. I know that. You've given up the life you loved in London, your friends, your parties, and consecrated yourself to the life of the opera. You've done your best. You've stuck to it. You've done all that you, or any other woman with your views and desires, could do for me in art. You've unmade me. I've been weak and contemptible enough to let you unmake me. From to-night I've got to build on ruins. Perhaps you'll say that's impossible. It isn't. I mean to do it. I'm going to do it. But I've got to build in freedom."

His eyes shone as he said the last words. They were suddenly the eyes not of a man crushed but of a man released.

She felt a pang of deadly cold at her heart.

"In—freedom?" she almost whispered.

She had believed that the failure of all her hopes, the

failure before the world of which she no longer dared to cherish any lingering doubt, had completely overwhelmed her.

In this moment she knew it had not been so, for abruptly she saw a void opening in her life, under her feet, as it were. And she knew that till this moment even in the midst of ruin she had been standing on firm ground.

"In freedom!" she said again. "What—what do you mean?"

He was silent. A change had come into his face, a faint and dawning look of surprise.

"What do you mean?" she repeated.

And now there was a sharp edge to her voice.

"That I must take back the complete artistic freedom which I have never had since we married, that I must have it as I had it before I ever saw you."

She got slowly up from the sofa.

"Is that—all you mean?" she said.

"All! Isn't it enough?"

"But is it all? I want to know—I must know!"

The look in her face startled him. Never before had he seen her look like that. Never had he dreamed that she could look like that. It was as if womanhood surged up in her. Her face was distorted, was almost ugly. The features seemed suddenly sharpened, almost horribly salient. But her eyes held an expression of anxiety, of hunger, of something else that went to his heart. He dropped his hand from the piano and moved nearer to her.

"Is that all you meant by freedom?"

"Yes."

She sighed and went forward against him.

"Did you think—do you care?" he stammered.

All the dominating force had suddenly departed from him. But he put his arms around her.

"Do you care for the man who has failed?"

"Yes, yes!"

She put her arms slowly, almost feebly, round his neck.

"Yes, yes, yes!"

She kept on repeating the word, breathing it against his cheek, breathing it against his lips, till his lips stifled it on hers.

At last she took her lips away. Their eyes almost touched as she gazed into his, and said:

"It was always the man. Perhaps I didn't know it, but it was—the man, not the triumph."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"AND you really mean to give up Kensington Square and the studio, and to take Djenan-el-Maqui for five years?" said Mrs. Mansfield to Charmian on a spring evening, as they sat together in the former's little library on the first floor of the house in Berkeley Square.

"Yes, my only mother, if—there's always an 'if' in our poor lives, isn't there?"

"If?" said her mother gently.

"If you will occasionally brave the Gulf of Lyons and come to us in the winter. In the summer we shall generally come back to you."

Mrs. Mansfield looked into the fire for a moment. Caroline lay before it in mild contentment, unchanged, unaffected by the results of America. Enough for her if a pleasant warmth from the burning logs played agreeably about her lemon-colored body, enough for her if the meal of dog biscuit soaked in milk was set before her at the appointed time. She sighed now, but not because she heard discussion of Djenan-el-Maqui. Her delicate noise was elicited by the point of her mistress's shoe, which at this moment pressed her side softly, moving her loose skin to and fro.

"The Gulf of Lyons couldn't keep me from coming," Mrs. Mansfield said at last. "Yes, I daresay I shall see you in that Arab house, Charmian. Claude wishes to go there again?"

"It is Claude who has decided the whole thing."

Charmian's voice held a new sound. Mrs. Mansfield looked closely at her daughter.

"You see, Madre, he and I—well, I think we have earned our retreat. We—we did stand up to the failure. We went to the first night of Jacques Sennier's new opera and helped, as everyone in an audience can help, to seal its triumph. I—I went round to Madame Sennier's box with Claude—Adelaide

Shiffney and Armand Gillier were in it!—and congratulated her. Madre, we faced the music."

Her voice quivered slightly. Mrs. Mansfield impulsively took her child's hands and held them.

"We faced the music. Claude is strong. I never knew what he was before. Without that tremendous failure I never should have known him. He helped me. I didn't know one human being could help another as Claude helped me after the failure of the opera. Even Mr. Crayford admired him. He said to me the last day, when we were going to start for the ship: 'Well, little lady, you've married the biggest failure we've brought over here in my time, but you have married a man!' And I said—I said—"

"Yes, my only child?"

"'I believe that's all a woman wants.'"

"Is it?"

Mrs. Mansfield's dark, intense eyes searched Charmian's.

"Is it all that *you* want?"

"You mean—?"

"Isn't the fear of the crowd still haunting you? Isn't uneasy ambition still tugging at you?"

Charmian took her foot away from Caroline's side and sat very still for a moment.

"I do want Claude to succeed, yes, I do, Madre. I believe every woman wants her man to succeed. But I shall never interfere again—never. I've had my lesson. I've seen the truth, both of myself and of Claude. But I shall always wish Claude to succeed, not in my way, but in his own. And I think he will. Yes, I believe he will. Weren't we—he and I—both extremists? I think perhaps we were. I may have been vulgar—oh, that word!—in my desire for fame, in my wish to get out of the crowd. But wasn't Claude just a little bit morbid in his fear of life, in his shrinking from publicity? I think, perhaps, he was. And I know now he thinks so. Claude is changed, Madre. All he went through in New York has changed him. He's a much bigger man than he was when we left England. You must see that!"

"I do see it."

"From now onward he'll do the work he is fitted to do,

only that. But I think he means to let people hear it. He said to me only last night: 'Now they all know the false man, I have the wish to show them the man who is real.' "

"The man who had the crucifix standing before his piano," said Mrs. Mansfield, in a low voice. "The man who heard a great voice out of the temple speaking to the seven angels."

She paused.

"Did he ever play you that?" she asked Charmian.

"One night in America, when our dear friend, Alfred Van Brinen, was with us. But he played it for Mr. Van Brinen."

"And—since then?"

"Madre, he has played it since then for me."

Charmian got up from her chair. She stood by the fire. Her thin body showed in clear outline against the flames, but her face was a little in shadow.

"Madretta," she began, and was silent.

"Yes?" said Mrs. Mansfield.

"Susan Fleet and I were once talking about theosophy. And Susan said a thing I have never forgotten."

"What was that?"

"She said: 'It's a long journey up the Ray.' I didn't understand. And she explained that by the Ray she meant the bridge that leads from the personal which perishes to the immortal which endures. Madre, I shall always be very personal, I think. I can't help it. I don't know that I even want to help it. But—but I do believe that in America, that night after the opera, I took a long, long step on the journey up the Ray. I must have, I think, because that night I was happy."

Her eyes became almost mysterious in the firelight. She looked down and added, in a withdrawn voice:

"*I* was happy in failure!"

"No, in success!" said Mrs. Mansfield.

THE END

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